Thesis By

HUNSU, Folasade Oyinlola

University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Towards a Theory of Otherness in Contemporary African Women's Autobiography

November 2010

TOWARDS A THEORY OF OTHERNESS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY

FOLASADE O. HUNSU
B.A. Ed (English) Ife
M.A. (Literature in English) Ife

A Thesis in the Department of English, Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in artial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

November 2010

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Mrs Folasade O. Hunsu in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

.....

Supervisor
Professor M.E.M. Kolawole
Professor of English

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Father and Saviour, my anchor and stronghold, the Almighty God, be all the glory for His grace and mercy that I have continually obtained. I thank Him for seeing me through this PhD programme. I am grateful to my supervisor, the divinely positioned helper of my destiny, Professor M.E.M. Kolawole, for all she has been to me since I met her. Only God can reward her for the help, love, and understanding she has shown to me.

Many thanks to my trainers who equipped and encouraged me to give my best to my studies: Mr. Ojo Olorunleke in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo over two decades ago, now a lecturer in the Department of English, Lagos State University, Dr Chima Anyadike who was always available to help me beyond my expectations, Professors Wole Ogundele, and Segun Adekoya. I am thankful for the kind help of Professor Sola Akinrinade, the immediate past Dean, Faculty of Arts, OAU, Ile-Ife, now Vice Chancellor, Osun State University; Dr (Mrs) Olaide Sheba, former Vice Dean, Faculty of Arts, OAU, Ile-Ife, Professor Biodun Adediran, Director Linkages and Sponsored Research, Obafemi Awolowo University and Professor Y. K. Yusuf, Dean Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University.

I also thank the following bodies for the financial support they provided for this PhD: the authorities of Obafemi Awolowo University, Carnegie Fellowship for Female Staff through the Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, under the leadership of Professor Sunbo Abiose; Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, Senegal; and American Council of Learned Societies, African Humanities Program New York. I also acknowledge the indelible impact of my academic visits to the University of Birmingham Centre of West African Studies as a Cadbury Fellow, University of London, and Centre for African Studies, United Kingdom and the 2009 US Institute on Contemporary

American Literature, University of Louisville, Kentucky, United States of America.

I thank my senior colleague, mentor and brother, Dr Oyeniyi Okunoye for pointing me in the direction of theoretical research, for showing me the way, for his financial and moral support, and constant encouragement. I appreciate my sister and friend, Dr Taiwo Soneye for her advice and prayers. I am grateful to Professor Remi Sonaiya for her insightful suggestions and painstaking reading of my proposal. I thank Professor Wale Adegbite, Head, Department of English, OAU, Ile-Ife for his support. I am grateful to Professors B. M. Ibitokun, Dipo Salami, Emeka Onakaogu and R. O. Atoye, all of the Department of English, O.A.U., Ile-Ife for their support and encouragement. I also thank Drs Bidemi Okanlawon, Moji Olateju, Dipo Babalola, Gbemisola Adeoti, Akin Akande, Rotimi Taiwo, A. Asiyanbola, Eunice Fajobi, Ayeomoni, Yemi Adegoju, Ibrahim Olaosun; Messrs Tony Adejuwon, A.T. Akinwale, and my neighbours, Mrs. Ifeanyi Arua and Mr Ola Faleye. I also thank my friends Mr Chijoke Uwasomba, Mrs. Yemisi Famakinwa and Mr. Bayo Mosobalaje for their unflinching support.

I appreciate the contributions of Dr Toyin Jegede, a woman of great vision and strength, Drs Ogunsiji, Remy Oriaku, Ayo Kehinde of the Department of English, University of Ibadan. I am grateful to Professor Niyi Aluko, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Dr Akin Alao, Director, Cultural Studies Centre, and Dr Wumi Raji, Department of Dramatic Arts, who made useful comments on my proposal.

I appreciate all my senior colleagues and co-labourers in the ministry, friends, prayer partners and acquaintances who were there for me and whose words of encouragement, financial and moral support saw me through the difficult times during this research. Some of such wonderful people include Rev Kayode and Mrs. Bimbo Ilupeju, Senior Pastor, Good News Baptist Church, Surulere Lagos; Pastors Segun and Oworonke Osunsan, Provincial Pastors,

Redeemed Christian Church of God, Province 12, Lagos; Pastor and Mrs Peter Imhohiosen, RCCG Abuja; Pastor and Mrs. Tosin Ogunsanlu, Gethsemane Prayer Ministries, Abuja; Pastor and Deaconess Dapo Ogunsola, RCCG Abuja; Pastor and Mrs Ayo Adelakun RCCG Lagos; Pastor and Mrs Femi Ayandiran; Dr and Dr Mrs Yomi Oninla; my dear mummy and pastor, Pastor Kemi Fayemi and her entire family, Pastor Kola and Pastor Faith Taiwo, Mrs Onana, Edith and Vera Onana, Mr and Mrs Femi Akamo, and the congregation at Foursquare Gospel Church, Oluwalose Quarters, Ile-Ife, other academic and administrative colleagues in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and all my children in the Lord: Ope Oladunjoye, Tomi and Omotunde Akinsiku, Kemi Adebiyi, Bamidele Omotayo, Joshua Adebayo, Busayo Faleye, Peter, Iniobong, Pastors Daniel, Ajiroba, Okoro, and Odewale. I thank the following people: my uncle and his wife, Rev and Mrs Olusegun Medaiyese, Mrs Felicia Ogunwumi, Dr and Dr Mrs. Yomi Oninla, my bosom friend Dncs. Dayo Dada and Mrs. Odunayo Adelana for their support. My brother in the home of the Akinsulores, Adedoyin Olusegun, you are a blessing to me.

To my parents, Elders Wole and Ife Famuyide, I say a very big thank you for always being there for me and my children, and for being a great source of strength and encouragement for me. Professor Deboye Kolawole a.k.a "Daddy K", your love, patience, and prayers are greatly appreciated. I thank my lovely brothers and sisters, Professor Abimbola and Mrs Omolola Famuyide, Olajumoke Famuyide, Honourable (Dr) Akindele and Maureen Famuyide, Olalekan and Ewa Famuyide, and Babatunde and Bolatito Oladele for their concern, love, and assistance all the way.

I thank my husband, Pastor Olusegun Josiah Hunsu. I appreciate you so much for allowing God to use you for my advancement in life. I thank my biological children and addition

ọ my family, Oluwaseun Mauyon, Ayooluwa Mauton, Oreoluwa Mautin, Ebunoluwa Maugbe, and Michael Medaiyese, for being so wonderful and understanding throughout the period of this research. I am greatly indebted to so many people whose names I am unable to mention here.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the King of Glory, Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour and to my husband, Olusegun.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION: OLOTO THEORY OF OTHERNESS AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

WORKS CITED

ABSTRACT

The study examined the thematic concerns, narrative strategies and the influence of national and familial histories on contemporary African women's autobiography. It examined the approach of these women to gender issues and the various ways in which they demystify cultural beliefs that are against the self-actualisation of African women. It analysed the positive and favourable portraiture of African women's otherness in autobiography through their deployment of the power of the subject-narrator. This was with the view to proposing an alternative approach to reading the construction of self and other in contemporary African women's autobiography.

Three fictional and three non-fictional autobiographies were selected for analysis. Texts were selected from African women's autobiographies published between 1996 and 2007 to reflect, to some extent, the multiple geographical locations and ideological persuasions, linguistic, cultural and historical divergences of women writers of autobiography in Africa. The fictional texts were Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall be Tanga* from Francophone Central Africa, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* from Anglophone West Africa and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* from Southern Africa. Non-fictional texts included Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis* from North Africa, Wambui Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* from East Africa and Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* from Southern Africa. The narrative styles employed by these writers to underline their otherness or difference from men, and other women were analysed under two broad categories; vocality and resistance as markers of otherness and female bonding and representations of motherhood as divergent modes of constructing otherness. Postcolonial and feminist theories were used to interpret these texts.

The results revealed that these women narrated life stories based on the concept that they were unique individuals as the *Oloto* discourse of the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria.

proposed. As *Oloto* spoke of her difference or otherness in order to accentuate her individuality within the group, selected authors chose to narrate aspects of their lived experiences that favoured their image as resilient, vocal, and politically conscious women who would not allow delimiting patriarchal structures to silence them. Their narratives often portrayed isolated and yet communal stories of strength and invincibility. They showed that being a woman was not enough reason to identify uncritically with men and even other women. They chose their associations according to certain criteria which often changed depending on the aspect of their lives they were projecting and how well other women and men promoted their positive images. The findings also showed that the externally imposed image of the "African woman" was often deconstructed to allow for an internally generated one within the autobiographical act. Their treatment of mothers questioned any simplistic description or categorization of women as mothers. The autobiographical mode enabled these female authors to centre the aspirations of African women and the narrative they engaged in within the framework of larger national and gender issues.

The study concluded that African women autobiographers demonstrated otherness in their resistance to patriarchy and the silencing of women, and as narrator-protagonists, they were in control of their discourse and determined the role and image of others.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL PRELIMINARIES

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a general introduction to the study. The chapter contains a preview of autobiography; its properties, definitions, and explanations of other major terminologies used in the study. It presents the statement of the problem, the aim and objectives of the study, methodology and data sources. The significance and scope of the study, its justification and a presentation of the organisation of subsequent chapters of the thesis are done in the last part of the chapter.

1.1 Autobiography

Autobiography is the narration or "telling" of someone's life and experience by that person in the first person singular pronoun "I". It can be in the form of written or performed prose narrative or poetry as we have in oral literature. The story can also be of more than one person's life, as in a collective narration of lives of members of same ethnic group, in which case the story will be told in the first person plural pronoun "we". Sometimes as we have in Victorian literature, the story might be collective yet told using the first person pronoun "I". The volumes of critical works on the genre of autobiography call to question any simplistic definition and classification of autobiography.

The process involved in writing autobiography includes a deliberate and conscious attempt on the part of the autobiographer to interpret past experiences, relive, and represent them in a creative order. Autobiography is then a "secondary world" or text that "mirrors the author's primary world" (Bressler 13). The primary world is the life lived in the past which the autobiographer has processed and possibly "laced with fiction" (Oriaku 7). Autobiography combines fact with fiction and blurs the rigid

polarisation of both. In autobiography, not all the events, circumstances, and author-protagonist's opinions are verifiable since the life story is "brought back" through the agency of memory, which in the words of Tsaaior, "can fail in sieving or sifting all the experiential realities of the 'I' subject" (29). The failure of memory gives room to embellishments, creating and recreating stories, and invariably some measure of "lies" or fictionalisation of "facts". Sometimes, writers intentionally embellish life stories in order to make them enjoyable to the reader. An autobiography is populated by characters, has an identifiable setting, and no matter how episodic or disjointed, it possesses its own plot. These features make possible the inclusion of autobiography in literary studies. Critics question truth in autobiography, the limitations of "writing" in the presentation of truth, the effect of memory in the truth promised by autobiography, the influence of literary abilities or skills of autobiographers on their works, and the singularity or plurality of the subject or subjects of autobiography, among others.

As a field of study, autobiography appropriates discursive strategies that cut across disciplines, movements and theories. One of such theories is feminism, whose exponents and proponents in autobiographical scholarship draw attention to the apprehension of the word by women autobiographers to express their own selfhood in distinct modes and media. One of the results of feminist criticism on autobiography is the inclusion of women's oral history, letters, and curriculum vitae as varieties of autobiography. They have also argued for instance, that autobiography may not be as individualistic as conventional critics claim because when women write or tell their life stories, they do so consciously or otherwise as members of the group called "women". Therefore, their experiences are usually representative of the group and like the cultural productions of all marginalised groups; a close examination of women's autobiography reveals an underlying utilitarian purpose that differs from that of male autobiography.

This difference includes, among others, the use of autobiography to speak on womanhood and motherhood, speaking against patriarchy and the oppressive structures it sustains as well as other themes that are peculiar to the lives of women.

However, fictional autobiography sometimes loosely referred to as autobiographical writing, is an imaginative form of self life narration. It may have referents outside the text but it relies more on the imaginative component for building the story than non-fictional autobiography. Marwa Elnaggar posits that in fictional autobiography, fantasy and reality freely mingle to produce readable and enjoyable work. African literary texts are sometimes referred to as "autobiographical" because they tell about the personal experiences of their writers or the collective/communal experiences of the ethnic groups to which these writers belong. For example, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy: *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols*, and *Children of the Eagle* are fictional texts "based on the history" of the author's community. In the "Author's Note" of these novels, the reader is introduced to the historical materials that form the narrations, which she refers to as "real" events and experiences that she witnessed and experienced. Most importantly, a substantial part of the texts are narrated in the first person singular/plural pronoun. These features make them autobiographical because the narrations have referents outside them.

It is important to note that autobiography cannot be described exclusively as a written or narrative genre because even though writing is explicit in the composition of the term, oral cultures, as we have in Africa, Australia, or Latin America also have their forms of oral autobiography. It can also be in the form of poetry or drama in addition to prose, depending on the medium chosen by the autobiographer to tell his/her life story. Adetayo Alabi has established that the genre does not have its origins in the West neither is it an imported form to Africa, but that it is visible in epics, praise poetry, and

other oral literary productions from Africa (*Telling Our Stories*).

However, the origins of the written autobiography can be traced to the twelfth dynasty of ancient Egypt in the writings of Amenemhet, and other ancient kings like the Hittite king Hatusilis, King Tiglat Pileser of Assyria, and the Persian Darius (Elnaggar 169). Autobiographies of the early centuries include those of Marcus Aurelius and St. Augustine's *Confessions* while Wordworth's *Prelude* and Dante's *La Vita Nuova* are some examples of later autobiographies in poetic forms (ibid). Attempts by critics to explore these strands in the study of autobiography have led to the understanding that the practice cannot be divorced from the location and values of the autobiographer.

In Africa, autobiography has emerged as a distinct form of cultural as well as self expression. In nationalist and Negritude poetry, prose fiction and even dramatic forms, both literary and non-literary writers represent their life stories. This is not surprising because autobiographical practice is a site for identity construction as well as a marker of social, cultural, and political manifestations. It is also an avenue for self-expression in certain literary periods as colonial travelogues and slave narratives show.

1.2 Clarification of Key Concepts and Terminologies

Various terms and concepts are used in this study. Some of them are: literary criticism and literary theory, literary tradition, feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, and otherness. These terms are considered basic to this study; hence they are explained briefly in the following sub-sections:

1.2.1 Literary Criticism and Literary Theory

Literary criticism and literary theory are scholarly fields, which co-operate to provide well informed, ordered, and justifiable interpretation, analysis and evaluation of a literary piece. Criticism is the practical side, which concerns itself with questions such

as: how many possible meanings can be derived from a text? Does a text perform any function apart from giving pleasure to its reader? What are some of the cultural and historical contexts that have influenced a text? Does the text relate with other texts in any way? This stream of questions is expected to provide answers that will enhance the understanding of a text and throw more light on aspects that would have otherwise been obscure.

Literary theory on its own part is more of abstraction because it deals with the provision of assumptions, principles, methods, and framework on which literary criticism builds its ideas. Literary theory forms the basis or informs the direction that literary criticism follows because it "speaks" underneath the meaning and interpretation the critic must have arrived at. By speaking underneath, literary theory also justifies the end product of literary criticism. However, it is not always the case that the critic, reader, or analyst makes their appraisal with the consciousness of a theory but a close examination of whatever they expunge from the text will reveal some underlying principles. It is also implied that "an innocent" analysis or interpretation is almost non-existent (Bressler 7), because every interpretation is a product of an assumption, idea, ideology or position.

1.2.2 Literary Tradition

A literary tradition refers to specific and recognisable group of writings and writers, which have been demarcated as a result of some shared or common characteristics noticeable in them. Literary traditions yield literary canons, which are sets of texts that are believed to be representative of such traditions. If we illustrate with Romanticism as a literary tradition, six male poets readily come to mind: William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Though there are gaps in their ages, critics have connected them based

on their treatment of poetry, nature, institutions such as the school, church, and marriage and the French revolution.

1.2.3 Feminisms

The term “feminism” was first used in Europe and United States of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to denote the political movement of women against discrimination and rights for women’s suffrage. It became an academic field only after it evolved into a recogniseable ideology. When referring to feminism in the United States of America, critics sometimes consider it as occurring in “waves”: first, second, and third waves. First Wave feminism covers the period from the nineteenth century to 1920, when the government passed the Nineteenth Amendment. The focus of women activists then was solely on political rights, while the Second Wave, from 1960s to 1970s witnessed an extension of the struggle against women’s subjugation and discrimination to the home, workplace, health, and education. Third Wave feminism focuses on the influence of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class on issues surrounding the identity of the woman and the fight against women’s oppression.

1.2.3.1 Radical Feminism

This type of feminism emphasises the fact that female oppression is fundamental to every of form oppression and that until men’s attitudes towards women are changed, both sexes have nothing in common and neither can they co-operate. For radicals, equality with men is not negotiable and all cultural structures must be upturned to favour women in order to achieve this equality. (Feministissues.com)

1.2.3.2 Marxist Feminism

This is also known as socialist or materialist feminism. This brand of feminism is based on Karl Marx’s theory on the mechanisms of social and economic oppression. Since Marxists oppose any form of oppression against the working class, Marxist

feminists on their own part for example, view prostitution as a corruption of wage labour in which prostitutes are used to foster capitalist structures. They link “the oppression of women to inequalities that developed in connection with the class system of private property.” **(**Feministissues.com) They also maintain that women are particularly discriminated against through underpayment as workers at home and in the workplace. This invariably, according to them, increases the profits of capitalists who benefit most from sexism. For women exploitation to end, capitalism must be eliminated so that wealth is equitably distributed in the society without the exploitation of women. **(**Feministissues.com)

1.2.3.3 Liberal Feminism

This feminism centres on freedom from oppressive state laws and cultural practices as being fundamental to women’s struggle for equality. Liberal feminists advocate a non-violent movement against all structures that promote sexism and female oppression generally. They believe that the woman has a right to choose in matters of reproduction, sexuality, and economy. They also argue that women are not well represented in democratic structures which determine the conditions under which they live and that women movement should identify and correct patriarchal traditions which promote this imbalance.

1.2.3.4 Black Feminism

Black feminism holds that race, class, and sexism are mutually inclusive categories that should be considered while discussing women oppression. Black feminists have been described as “women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society” (Hill-Collins 5).

1.2.3.5 Womanism

This term was coined by Alice Walker to describe black women's peculiar experiences and "an emergent femaleness or feminine coming-of-age" (Kolawole 21). Womanism as a type of feminism accommodates men more than most types of feminism because its proponents opine that both non-white men and women are oppressed in racist settings. As quoted by Kolawole, Walker describes the womanist as:

> A Black feminist or feminist of color…who loves other women, sexually and/or asexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture…sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female….Womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender. (21)

Since Walker's proposition, African theorists and writers have developed another brand of womanism which they claim attends more to the realities of African women. African womanism recognises the varieties of problems and struggles faced by African women and it seeks to understand and eradicate women's and men's oppression through an interrogation of stifling cultural values, myths, traditions, and external (colonial/Western) influences that promote and sustain oppression. Kolawole explains that African womanism understands the fact that "African women's search for self-realization is identical to the quest of all oppressed, marginalized or undermined groups" (36). African womanism is not opposed to men in the way radical feminism does but supports the co-operation of men and women to eradicate unfavourable socio-political conditions in Africa.

1.2.4 Postcolonial Theory and Criticism

This refers to the literary theory developed in the nineteen eighties to investigate the literatures about and of former colonies of Britain. It has its roots in various movements of blacks against white domination and oppression and the Negritude

philosophy, as seen in the literary and critical works of Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, David Diop, and other writers. Their writing promotes the black culture, speaks against colonialism, and explores exile and alienation as negative products of colonialism and Western education (Alabi, *Telling Our Stories* 18). In application, that is criticism, it specifically examines the "interconnection of issues of race, nation, empire, migration and ethnicity with cultural production" (Moore-Gilbert 6). It "situates postcolonial literatures within the contexts and conditions of their production" (Alabi 37).

1.2.5 Otherness

The term "otherness" is derived from the word "other" and used by feminist and postcolonial critics to describe the state of being "different". Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain that "the 'other' is anyone who is separate from one's self" (2005: 169). In feminist sense, it is the condition of the woman as the "other" of man. Feminists employ the term to highlight the distinctive biological, psychological, and sociological realities of women. In fact, it is sometimes conceived as a negative term, which makes certain unacceptable demands on the woman. "Other" is a highly problematic term, which postcolonial criticism considers the part of the "discourse of the colonizer" that is used to describe "the colonized". "Difference" is a synonym of otherness and both will be used interchangeably in this study. It should be noted that at the centre of the concept of "difference" in feminist criticism is the notion that women are different from men, and secondly, even among women, there are "differences" in opinion about what it means to be a woman.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The plethora of scholarly books, critical essays and review articles on Western women's autobiographical writing testifies to the evolution of series of systematic and theoretical explications to which the genre has been subjected. These works have

redefined the properties of autobiography earlier popularised by male writers and critics to conform to peculiar motifs and conditions of female writings in Western circles. They have also influenced the reading and categorisation of women's autobiography across continents and cultures, overshadowing the dynamics made possible by the interplay between histories, locations, socio-cultural realities and autobiographies.

The literary possibilities generated by these dynamics are indications that female identity and lived experiences are most likely differently constructed and narrated in Western and African cultures. In addition, the influence of slave narratives, colonialism, socio-political conditions obtainable in Africa, and globalisation on the autobiography of African women cannot be ignored. The implication for autobiographical critique is that critical paradigms - the articulation of an isolated self, the privileging of written over oral as shown in the suffix "graphy", the presentation of autobiography as a mere process of self-knowing (Smith and Watson 2001), the recognition of homosexual narratives as a sub-genre of autobiography - that were developed by the West (male, female) may not apply to African women's autobiography.

To address this problem, the study answers the following questions:

(a) What are the points of convergence and divergence between Western autobiography, black autobiography, African men's autobiography and African women's autobiography?

(b) What are the symbols, myths, cultural practices, political experiences, and values that shape African women's projection of otherness, selfhood, and identity in their autobiographies?

(c) What discursive strategies in African women's autobiography create a sub-tradition within the larger tradition of black and African autobiography?

1.4 Aim and Objectives of Study

The study aims at theorising contemporary African women's autobiography in order to underline how its practitioners create works that are self-determining and autonomous. In specific terms, it seeks to:

(a) examine existing criticism of autobiography, including feminist and postcolonial, and their relevance or otherwise to selected texts;

(b) identify specific literary techniques, historical, social and cultural conditions that shape the construction of "self" and otherness in these narratives;

(c) indicate convergences and differences between selected autobiographies, and

(d) develop a theory for interpreting contemporary African women's autobiography.

1.5 Significance of Study

Current debates on postcolonial feminist writing privilege the need for African women's voices both in critical and literary practice. The study harmonises theory and narrated experiences of women and highlights the specifics of these experiences. It reveals how indigenous practices and discursive practices facilitate the invention of autobiographical acts that are unique to African women. This study explores the female tradition within the larger context of black and African autobiography, thereby identifying it as a distinct category in African literature.

1.6 Hypothesis

The main assumptions informing the study are that:

(a) new images of African women are emerging within the contemporary social, economic and political contexts of Africa;

(b) hidden sources in self-life-narratives of African women link them to a socio-cultural

and historic past which is presented in ways that interrogate Western theories of gender and autobiography; and

(c) African women make sense of their own lives according to their own aesthetic criteria and assemble their lives, as evident in their autobiography, (knowingly or unknowingly) according to some ideological and cultural templates and thus resist the status quo.

1.7 Expected Contribution of Study

The theoretical framework developed in this study is expected to assist scholars in interpreting otherness as a complex concept and as an empowering category in autobiography. More specifically, the study provides a contemporary theory of African women's autobiography that de-emphasises rigid regional approach for the study of African women's autobiography but emphasises the inter-relatedness of narrated lives of women in themes and styles. It establishes autobiography as an important channel of literary creativity by African women writers.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of Study

The study only covers autobiographies written between the 1990s and early twenty-first century because of the increase in women's writing within this period in African literary practice. This period also features socio-political and historical landmarks in African nations; for instance, the post-apartheid era in South Africa, democratisation of African states, the campaign for gender equity, and the spread of HIV/AIDS that are conditions that must have influenced women's autobiographical practice. Moreover, religious autobiographical productions will not be included in the study. Apart from these, autobiographies written in indigenous languages do not feature in the study because they are likely to raise different sets of issues that are not focused upon in this study.

1.9 Methodology

A selection of six texts, spread across six regions from a wide range of fictional and non-fictional autobiographies authored by women is used for analysis. This study explores environmental and cultural differences in selected texts and connects them by adopting feminist and postcolonial approaches in reading them. Specifically, it examines the influences of the various types of colonialism experienced in different parts of Africa, Western education, Islam and Christianity, ethnicity, political struggles of groups like the Mau Mau of East Africa, multiculturalism and migration, and others on these autobiographies. The study discusses the ways in which these women interrogate otherness from the perspective of the different realities that they have experienced. It highlights the different temperaments that the selected works exhibit towards issues like marriage, womanhood and motherhood, religion, the extended family system, and men.

1. 9.1 Data Sources

Two sets of data sources are used for the study: Primary sources/texts and secondary sources/texts. Choice of primary texts is premised on the demonstration of theoretical assumptions. A regional boundary is not the dominant criterion for selection because previous studies in African women's autobiography have been basically regional. Choice of texts reflects to some extent, the multiple geographical locations, and ideological persuasions, linguistic, cultural and historical divergences of women practitioners of autobiography in Africa. Special attention is paid to factors such as age, migrant status, and religion, all of which enable distinct as well as overlapping discourses. In view of these criteria, texts are selected from the four geographical zones of Africa:

North Africa - Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis*

West Africa - Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*

South Africa - Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*

East Africa - Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*

The linguistic criterion considers three of the major official languages of African states: Arabic, French, and English Language. Nawaal El Saadawi writes in Arabic but her works are usually translated into English and the other three are written in English. Nawal El Saadawi and Wambui Waiyaki Otieno are activists who participated alongside men in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid in their respective countries.

One other text is included in the list of primary texts for meeting the linguistic and cultural factors: Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall be Tanga*, written originally in French and later translated into English. As a creative writer from Cameroon but resident in France, her perspective reflects the postcolonial and multicultural Africa. The contemporary discourse engendered by HIV/AIDS is also factored into the selection criteria resulting in the choice of an autobiography of an HIV positive woman Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*. The inclusion of three creative autobiographies - Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall be Tanga*, Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* underscores the creative mode of African women's autobiographies. This brings the total number of primary texts to six. Library and Internet resources, particularly databases of universities are searched for secondary materials.

1.9.2 The Organisation of Subsequent Chapters

In Chapter Two, a critical review of existing literature on the topic is carried out. It examines the emergence of autobiography as a field of study paying particular attention to critics' attempt at giving generic definitions of and theorising the properties of autobiography. A review of relevant literature on black and African American

autobiography is also done in this chapter. In addition, this chapter identifies major debates and interventions of feminist approaches, highlighting the perspectives occasioned by issues of gender and sexuality that studies of women's autobiography have introduced into the field. This is followed by a review of existing literature on African autobiography, with specific attention paid to studies in African women's autobiography.

Chapter Three discusses the concept of otherness as proposed by postcolonial and feminist theorists. This chapter provides the theoretical paradigm for the study of African women's autobiographies. By examining some fictional and non-fictional autobiographical works, it identifies the ways in which slave narratives, Western women's, and contemporary African autobiographical writings portray otherness. It also presents the *Oloto* theory of otherness and its oral antecedent.

Chapter Four discusses thematic preoccupations and styles of the following non-fictional autobiographies: Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis,* Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*, and Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love.* They are discussed as texts that demystify vocality and reinscribe it as a strategy of resistance. It examines how these women appropriate the strength of the autobiographical "I" to design narratives about the "other", including immediate and extended family relations and speak about the unspeakable. This chapter explores the convergences and differences in these texts. This analysis takes on feminist and postcolonial theories as they apply to contemporary experiences of African women and their representation in autobiography. It carries out this analysis by discussing how these women appropriate and recreate the *Oloto* discourse to suit their narratives.

Chapter Five examines fictional autobiographical texts of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (*Children of the Eagle*), Calixthe Beyala (*Your Name Shall be Tanga*), and

(*Mother to Mother*) as continuities of non-fictional contemporary African women's autobiography. The merging of "selves" and bonding in African women's autobiographical fiction are explored. The different approaches to motherhood in these texts are examined in the context of socio-political and cultural repertoires available to female authors of fictional autobiographical writing in African literature.

The last chapter concludes the study by discussing the applicability of *Oloto* theory of otherness to contemporary African women's autobiography. It summarises the themes and narrative techniques that are identifiable in the texts selected for the study. The chapter reveals how the narratives of Nawal El Saadawi, Wambui Waiyaki Otieno, Tendayi Westerhof, Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo, Calixthe Beyala, and Sindiwe Magona engender a tradition that voices and represents the aspirations and struggles of contemporary African women.

CHAPTER TWO

An Examination of the Critical Reception of Autobiography and Women's Autobiographical Voices

2.0 Introduction

This chapter traces the development of autobiography as a genre to the critical reception of African women's autobiographical practice. It is divided into five sections in order to highlight the theoretical progression and major debates in the field of study. The sections are: The genre of autobiography, women's autobiography, black autobiography, African autobiography, and African women's autobiography.

2.1 The Genre of Autobiography

As earlier mentioned in Chapter One, autobiography as a genre can be traced to the twelfth Egyptian dynasty.However, according to Charles Berryman in "Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography", the term "autobiography" was coined by a linguist in the eighteenth century, who thought there was need to harmonise and bring under one umbrella the various narrations made by individuals of their own experiences. By the nineteenth century, the word had been used by journalists and scholars to refer to forms of writing about "self". Despite the fact that the term autobiography has been used to designate life writing since the eighteenth century, it was not given critical attention until the middle of the twentieth century unlike other genres of literature like prose fiction, poetry, and drama. These three genres had dominated the critical space of literary studies for long before autobiography became recognised as a genre within literary studies.

This is probably because autobiographies were largely received as tools for

historical and religious studies, useful for collecting and analysing historical events and understanding the roles of individuals, including tracing the development of religious principles that guided people of a particular age and civilisation. Though historians still questioned its authenticity and reliability as a source of data collection because of its highly subjective nature, its subjectivity did not prevent scholars from drawing on it to analyse histories. Wilhelm Dilthey was among the first group of scholars to call for the use of autobiography in the writing and analysis of human history. In his study, he describes autobiography as "the highest and most instructive form on, which the understanding of life comes before us" (qtd. in Rickman 85-6). By "life" he means the totality of events that can be understood as markers of historical moments and how people responded to these events as we read from their autobiographies. His comments became an opener into the study of the genre in early twentieth century as critics began to pay closer attention to autobiographies.

In the same light, Georg Misch identifies the subject "I" in funeral publications, letters written about and by great men in history, makes a case for the study of autobiography as the gateway for understanding cultures and civilisations that produced such men and their autobiographies. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson summarise Misch's position,

> For Misch, the normative generic characteristics of autobiography and the criteria for the success of any particular life narrator rest in the writer's relationship to the arena of public life and discourse. People who have lived their lives in the public sphere, people who have been actors in important historical events or moments, people who have achieved fame or notoriety in public, are the "representative" and appropriate subjects of what he designates autobiography. (*Reading Autobiography* 114-15)

He emphasises the importance of "greatness" as a criterion for studying any autobiography and does not apply the term "autobiography" to any life writing that fails to fulfil this criterion. Though Misch and other historians assert the status of

autobiography as a field of study, they only consider the "life" of notable men worthy of critical attention or study, an emphasis that invariably excludes the "life" of the woman, slave, or colonised person from the field of autobiography. In other words, if we reckon with Misch, these groups of people are by virtue of their status excluded from the category of greatness and therefore, whatever comes out of their life narratives can neither reflect the society nor give us better understanding of history.

In terms of theorising autobiography, Georges Gusdorf's essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" is regarded as the foundational work that opened this critical phase. Gusdorf seems to have agreed with Misch's concept of representative life but only extends it by stipulating that one of the conditions under which autobiography is possible is the consciousness of "self" apart from "others". According to him, this consciousness separates the autobiographer from ordinary people who might not possess this same level of consciousness and self-knowledge as this isolated individual. In addition to this, he opines that autobiography is about a "self" that is unique and universal, and by being a universal subject, his life is representative of others irrespective of personal experiences of these "others". Gusdorf's essay, despite its imperialist approach, inaugurated attempts to put autobiography in the same league with other genres of literature. His essay also has to its credit critical reactions from feminist and postcolonial critics that interrogate the idea of a "universal self" and the "isolated self" that exists apart from others. However, despite the various criticisms, his work remains relevant and guides critics in the understanding of the narrator of an autobiography as a distinct persona or subject that determines the course and nature of the narrative. The range of texts selected for this study shows the importance of individual writer's control over the form and content of their autobiographies, a factor that cannot be ignored in theorising contemporary African women's autobiography.

Another reason for the late attention given to the critical study of autobiography is that literary critics did not conceive of autobiography as a literary genre. They questioned its viability as literature because they regarded it as a factual and verifiable writing that would not give room for imagination and creativity. Among these critics were Rene Wellek and Austen Warren, two of the early theorists of literature. In their work, they oppose the classification of autobiography as a genre because according to them, it does not fit into "works in which the aesthetic function is dominant" (25). Their argument is based on what they consider the absence of imaginative component in autobiography, as this ingredient is one of the delineating characteristics of literary genres like prose, poetry, and drama. In their analysis, autobiography is about real life narrative of a real person as against the fictional characters of other genres. This line of argument characterised the problematic absence of autobiography in mainstream theorising and informed subsequent attempts by critics to find a definition of autobiography that would reflect its authenticity as a reliable narrative of personal experience and a literary writing.

However, Northrop Frye disputes the non-literariness of autobiography posited by Wellek and Warren. He argues that narratives of lives are done in an order, with a conscious attempt to select events to be narrated, and are presented according to the writer's choice of style and representation. Frye agrees with a definition that reflects the fictional, that is, that aspect of life writing that conforms to prose fiction, and the factual aspect of autobiography. His conclusion is that autobiography is a combination of both fiction and fact. Frye's study highlights the basic elements of life writing that make it interesting to read and interpret: the imaginative and factual. Both are indivisible, bringing to the present a past from the writer's memory and mediated by the act of writing, which on its own terms makes certain demands on the writer's imagination and

qualifies the writing to be subjected to critical analysis like other genres.

Other theorists have examined the nature of autobiography in terms of its reliability as a factual writing. Like Frye, Roy Pascal opines that autobiography is a form of fictionalised history in which the autobiographer writes about a past from a given standpoint and is therefore, more likely to interpret this past and organise it in view of the present situation of the autobiographer. Pascal points out the difference between the "I" of the past and "I" of the present and bridges this difference by invoking the elements of memory, construction and reconstruction of past events to suit the purpose of the present. The second aspect of Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* advances the debate by defining autobiography as a narration of past life done by an individual in which he searches for "the true self" (39). Pascal describes the process of writing autobiography as an act of conscious and coherent design in which the autobiographer searches for the truth. Pascal's work brought the study of autobiography to a new level where language and other features of narration such as setting, plot, and narrative technique are as important as the life being narrated. These elements of autobiography are examined in this study and factored in to the theory being proposed.

However, another critic, Robert F. Sayre strongly questions the "coherence and unity" which Pascal claims are present in autobiography. He argues that autobiography is not a narration of a unified subject with a singular identity but that it is rather a representation of multiple identities as exemplified by the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. Sayre maintains that multiplicity of identities is fundamental to autobiography because it shows the complexities that have necessitated them and determines the "truth" or "lie" of the autobiography. From this point, truth, coherence, and unity became problematic in the field of study and attention was shifted from searching for a true self to the possibilities of having not a single, unified identity but identities that are products

of different life experiences. Though Sayre does not agree with Pascal's theory and both theorists do not refer to any woman's autobiography, both works are foundational in the concept of women's multiple identities and agency in formulating the poetics of their autobiographical writing.

Following in the footsteps of Frye and Pascal is Loius Renza who gives a more radical definition of autobiography that supports neither factual nor fictional descriptions of autobiography. He describes it as being

> neither fictive nor non-fictive, not even a mixture of the two. We might view it instead as a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, the project of self-presentification, of converting oneself into the present promised by language… Thus we might conceive of autobioghraphical writing as an endless prelude: a beginning without a middle (the realm of fiction), or without end (the realm of history); an incomplete project, unable to be more than an arbitrary document…. (22)

Renza strongly argues that it is difficult to confine autobiography to any simple category because unlike fiction in which there is a complete world comprising setting, characters, and action, and in which the reader is invited to supply the missing links in the imaginative world, autobiography consistently leaves in its wake unfinished and unbridgeable past. In Renza's analysis, even the autobiographer is not in a position to fill this gap that is occasioned by memory and a condition that warrants the writer to verbalise an elusive past which is further unsettled by the medium of language. He further explains that as Roland Barthes claims in his autobiography, there are two "I's", the "I" of the past and that of the present who is new as a result of development and growth in perception of "self" and the life it lived in the past. By separating the "I" of the past from the present "I", Renza hopes to prove that the written text is only evidence of the "present and new man" and not in any way a complete narrative of both "I's". Moreover, he asserts, using St. Augustine's *Confessions* as an example, that words, by their composition are finite, signifying "a higher signifier, the *logos* of human

consciousness, which in turn signifies what cannot become signified, the eternal *logos*" (8).

Augustine separates the knowable body from the unknowable eternal soul that cannot be represented in words and this, in Renza's perception, is a way of covering up secrets of the life of the autobiographer, which will remain unknown to the reader. He opines that the best that the autobiographer does is to convert the "I" of the past to a "he" in order to maintain a self-privacy in the public domain of writing. Renza's study brings to the fore, the inadequacy of memory to complete the life story being told and the intentional ellipsis included in the narrative that is encouraged by language. Most importantly, his study is relevant because it balances the imaginative tendencies of autobiographical act with the non-imaginative and highlights the agency of the writer in representing "self" according to some identifiable ideology and strategy.

James Olney's study moved the discussion on finding an appropriate definition for autobiography towards a more engaging and literary direction. He maintains that defining autobiography may not be as relevant as considering the intentions or motives of the autobiographer in narrating self and product of this narration *vis a vis* the image of self that emerges as a result of these intentions. He opines that both the author and the text must be read as parts of a whole in order to understand the autobiography. Unlike earlier scholars who consider the text and author as separate entities in their studies, Olney recognises the vital role played by authorial intentions in the actual representations which are read as autobiography. According to Olney, there is need to examine both the "philosophy and psychology" of autobiography, where psychology stands for the intention of the author and philosophy is the kind of images of self that emerge from the exercise (30). These images represent the perception of that individual of the world, which Olney describes as a process by which "one creates from moment to

moment and continuously the reality to which one gives a metaphoric name and shape, and that shape is one's own shape" (Ibid, 34). It is through these metaphors that self-knowledge and representation are made possible in autobiography. Olney's position brings more forcefully than other theorists have done, the aesthetic component of autobiography and introduces the literary analytical mode to the study. It is in view of this position that this study combines both fictional and non-fictional autobiographical texts in the consideration of a theory for reading African women's autobiography. Olney's study also provides an insight into the applicability of analytical literary tools in reading the autobiographies selected for this study.

While Olney, like Gusdorf, examine "self", another notable critic, William Spengemann, extends Olney's position and explores the proposition that autobiography by nature is unreliable and that the form of autobiography intended by the writer determines the choice of events in the past that are narrated and the perspective presented to the reader. Spengemann sheds more light on this approach to the study of autobiography by categorising autobiography according to both the intention of the autobiographer and the outcome of representing his life. The first is historical autobiography, then philosophical autobiography, and poetic autobiography. In historical autobiography, the author narrates self in the past; philosophical is another stage, which he also considers as a form of autobiography, in the process of self-narration which images "self" as a product of both past and present while poetic autobiography is the representation of self through the "performance of symbolic action" (8). Spengemann's work is generally acknowledged as groundbreaking in the discussion of the types of autobiography because before him, critics did not attempt to map out possible types of autobiography. However, like other theorists, he completely excludes

women's autobiography from the range of texts that he uses in arriving at these categories of autobiography.

Generally, the problem of defining autobiography and its generic conventions has yielded more questions than answers because of the indeterminacy of several components of life writing. Timothy Dow Adams, in a compelling discussion of modern American autobiography, argues that since Pascal's seminal work, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, critics have been working round the three major terms in the title of Pascal's work namely design, truth and autobiography. Adams submits that:

> *Design* has been treated under such headings as genre, form, mode, and style; *truth* has been handled in a bewildering variety of ways, including its relation to fiction, nonfiction, fact, fraud, figure, memory, identity, error, and myth. The word *autobiography* has frequently been analyzed in terms of its three separate components: *autos* or self, *bios* or life, and *graphe* or writing. (1)

Adams substantiates the concept put forward in this study, that autobiographies can be classified according to recognisable methods and patterns in which writers consciously or unconsciously arrange their life stories. In his analysis of modern American autobiography, Adams opines that autobiographers intentionally cover-up aspects of their lives and put forward confusing and contradicting imagery of themselves. He proceeds from Pascal's position that design, truth, and autobiography are parts of a whole, which constitutes "the autobiographical paradox" but that more than examining the "truth" standard of autobiography, the "lies" ought to be considered. He maintains:

> Although I believe that these paradoxes are essential to autobiography and that any attempt to resolve them completely would destroy the compelling charm of the form, I also believe that behind the confusions they represent lies one unstressed problem, a problem that calls for the addition of one more key term to the original three-*lying*. Virtually all of the discussion about autobiography I have been summarizing focuses on truth. Throughout all of the critical efforts to sort out these paradoxes, few theorists have dealt with lying itself, despite the fact that autobiography is synonymous with lying for many readers. (3)

Therefore, he demarcates the modern American autobiography tradition by looking at the way in which these autobiographers lie about themselves, thereby using "lie" and not "truth" as the measure of American autobiography. Though Adams succeeds in categorising American autobiography, he fails to include the female voice in his category and falls into the trap of assuming that women's autobiography can be accounted for in men's autobiography.

So far, this section has focused on the two main theoretical components of autobiography- referentiality and subjectivity and contributions of critics while we are yet to explore theoretical propositions put forward by some practitioners of autobiography. An example is Roland Barthes whose autobiography, *Roland Barthes*, is more of a theoretical enterprise than an ordinary narrative. He attempts to disrupt one of the most obvious conventions of autobiography, which is that the narration refers to a subject outside the narration. Barthes disconnects himself from his life writing by showing that right from the point he starts writing about "self" of the past, the fact of the present made known through language nullifies the existence of any "self" beyond the linguistic "self". In other words, the life that is represented in the autobiography is not the same as the one who lives in the present and who is doing the narration.

Paul Eakin addresses himself to Barthes project and submits that though Barthes would like readers to believe that his autobiography is not about himself but a remote character or persona called "R.B. or Roland Barthes", the autobiography's referent is no other than the theorist, Roland Barthes. He insists, "autobiography is nothing if not a referential art, and the self or subject is its principal referent" (3). Eakin's brilliant and revealing analysis of the strange form of reference in *Roland Barthes* foregrounds the need to revisit the relationship between language and subjectivity, particularly as espoused by poststructuralists who opine that language is inadequate in referring to any

subject. He goes further to explain that the referentiality of the autobiographical "I" that Barthes struggles to deny is evident in the fact of his handwriting, signature, photographs, and bibliographic references to his earlier works, which are all visible in his autobiography. Eakin proves that by including these elements in his autobiography, Barthes clears any doubt about the referent of the life writing and that the autobiographer cannot exclusively determine how his autobiography is to be read even though he proposes a theory of "anti-autobiography" with which he intends his work to be read. Interestingly, rather than disprove self-referentiality in autobiography, Eakin shows that Barthes strengthens this element. More importantly, Eakin's analysis shows that a careful reading of autobiographies may reveal underlying theories that will promote new theoretical positions and interpretation of such texts. He also shows that autobiography is a peculiar genre that continues to attract theorists and engender theoretical postulations such as this study intends to take.

2.2 Women's Autobiography

As in other genres of literature, feminist critics of women's autobiography have relentlessly argued that the female autobiography is not only markedly different from male's, but have also insisted that theories that derive from reading male autobiography are not sufficient for female autobiography. Shari Benstock's book, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, is one of the earliest volumes contributed by feminist critics to the theorising of autobiography especially, women's autobiography. The book comprises essays that examine the key words in the title of the book: self, private, theory, practice, and women's autobiography. Benstock in her introduction advocates the blending of theory and practice in autobiography criticism in order to avoid privileging theory over practice or practice over theory. She

criticizes the blind application of theory to texts without considering the implication for minority groups such as women, blacks, and lesbians. Her position on the utilitarian function of autobiography is relevant to this study. She states that autobiography allows minority groups to find a voice "whether private or public- through which to express that, which cannot be expressed in other form" (4-5). In this sense, women utilise autobiography as a medium for self-expression in patriarchal settings, which assign silence to women and vocality to men.

Furthermore, in her opening essay in the book, Benstock argues that dismantling component parts of "auto-bio-graphy" in the definition proposed by some critics gives undue attention to a part over the others. For instance, she questions James Olney's definition in which he concentrates on "auto", that is "self", more than the medium, "graphy" which is writing. Benstock pushes for the recognition of the agency of the writer in choosing the aspect of life to be emphasised over others. The point she makes is that women writers, such as Virginia Woolf ignore "self-consciousness" as the major element in writing life. Benstock explains that Woolf's autobiographical writing; diaries, letters, and memoirs, raises questions as to the validity of traditional convention of autobiography popularised by male autobiographers such as Rousseau, Proust, Montaigne, or Sir Leslie Stephen. She argues that rather than emphasise "self-consciousness", Woolf de-emphasises it and builds her writing on "the thoughtless, the loose, the unrestrained, the unconscious" (18). Benstock shows that from Woolf's autobiographical writing, the traditional definition of autobiography as the narrative account of "self", in which the autobiographer is seen to have the authority to witness his own being, the representation of a logical whole, the result of a conscious recalling of the past, is reconceptualised and dismantled. She further points out that Woolf disproves the idea of the autobiographical being in the "conscious control of artist over

subject matter" and the authority of the male artist to determine the course of the autobiographical. Benstock's essay is principal in the theorising of women's autobiography and registers the authority of women autobiographers in redefining the properties of the genre. By extension, just as Woolf's autobiographical writing occasions a theory, African women's autobiography also possesses qualities that necessitate theoretical categories that have not been adequately explored in existing autobiography criticism.

Feminist critics of women's autobiography have also proposed that women's autobiographical "self" is multiple and not single like men's. Susan Friedman's work examines the "selves" of women's autobiography. She disagrees with George Gusdorf's theory of the isolated and individual subject and argues that "self" in women's autobiography cannot be read as an isolated being. She proceeds in her argument by using theoretical models of "self" contained in the works of Nancy Chodorow and Sheila Rowbotham. According to Friedman, women write as members of a marginalised group who have been psychologically conditioned to consider "self" in relation to "other": mother and other women. She explains that the individuation process of women differs from men's and by implication, while men think of "self" as being different from "other", women's "self", like other minorities, is "collective and relational". Her assertion may not always apply to women in oppressive conditions who will want to differentiate self from the oppressors even when both sides are of the same ethnic group. Friedman draws from the autobiographical writings of women to argue that Gusdorf's theory that individualism, not collectivity, marks the presence of autobiography cannot apply to women's autobiography. Their writings can only make sense if read and interpreted as a literary tradition which presents autobiographical "selves" rather than "self" and these "selves" are interdependent and in relationship with "others".

Friedman's theory applies to African women's autobiography in which the experience of "self" is as important as the "other" who are considered as important as the writing subject and about whom she writes in her autobiographical text.

Apart from exploring the intervention of women in autobiography, theorists of women's autobiography have continued to define women's tradition in terms of the effect of autobiography on the female condition. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson posit that women's autobiographical practice is an act of decolonisation of the woman. In the introductory chapter of their book *De/colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, they define de/colonization in two ways. First, according to them, decolonization is the process involved in the disengagement of colonizers from colonies either through peaceful or violent means. They identify the various types of colonization, which exist (as at 1992) in Northern Ireland, the West Bank in Israel, and in South Africa. They maintain that in order to understand the concept of colonization, it is necessary to contextualize it in the various theories that have attempted to theorize the concept. They opine that while Foucault's theory ascribes power to the subject as a colonizer, Lacanian theory proposes, that "everyone is subjected to and colonized by the Law of the Father" and for material postmodernists, all "I's" are "colon-I-zed" simply because they cannot be isolated from the multiple cultural factors that produce them (xiv). In their explanation, colonization can be adapted to suit any approach favoured by the critic. Furthermore, they invoke Giyatri Spivak's query, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in an attempt to highlight the speakability of women in colonised nations. They assert that the inability of the subaltern, or the woman to speak is a pointer to her status as the colonised. Therefore, for Smith and Watson, the act of writing autobiography is a process of decolonization for the woman who has been silenced by the patriarchal order.

One of the major contributions of their work to women's autobiography is their interrogation of the universalism of the Western subject upon which Foucauldian and Lacanian theories are based. They admit that in colonial contexts, referring to women and colonies' conditions, both subjects are deprived of subjecthood because the universal, male colonizer subject speaks for all. They insist that the diversities of contexts of autobiographical practice should include factors as varied as gender, locations, language, history, culture, and socio-political experience. Their study continues to be relevant in debates of women's autobiography because the choice of essays collected in the volume shows from different perspectives, how the colonial, marginalized subjects speak for themselves and reconstruct the autobiographical in consonance with their experience as the colonized. Also notable and of relevance to this study is their comment that autobiographical writing "transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors" (xvii).

Watson takes the discussion further by examining the "unspeakable sexual differences and politics" between heterosexual and lesbian autobiography in her contribution to the volume, "Unspeakable Differences: The Politics of Gender in Lesbian and Heterosexual Women's Autobiographies in Decolonizing". She begins her essay by describing "unspeakable" through an examination of Rita Felski's statement that "feminist autobiography is a genre of autobiography of the marginalized that enables the realization of new subjects who are operating in a counter-public sphere" (165). By citing Felski, Watson demonstrates that women's autobiography is an ideological and political tool through which matters of the private space are made public and at the same time attempts to resist delimiting space given to women in the public sphere. Watson explains that the grouse that some Chino-American critics have with Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior*, is the author's mention

of “unspeakable” Chinese traditions. She submits that by naming those things that mark the multiplicity of cultural differences, Kingston transgresses dominant traditional narrative and meaning. Watson concludes, “like other autobiographers of marginality, the woman writer has to break silence to question dominant structures of meaning” and that the “unspeakable would be mapped as what becomes speakable when boundaries are traversed, articulated, confused, and undone” (144-5). Watson’s essay supports the concept of the “unspeakable” as those issues that are considered private but very important in the understanding of the female, which is explored in this study as a marker of African women’s autobiography.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s autobiography continues to draw critical attention in feminist criticism of autobiography because of the contestation of issues of imagination and reality in autobiography. Kingston has been accused by fellow Chino-Americans of distorting the “truth” about age-long Chinese mythology and culture. According to Marwa Elnaggar, “they complain that Kingston’s myths are not true to their originals, and that Kingston distorts and mangles time-honored Chinese myths to suit her own purposes at the risk of endangering their purity” (176). Rather than questioning the “truth” of Kingston’s autobiography like earlier male critics could have done, Elnaggar blames Kingston’s critics for failing to recognise the imaginative or “fantasy” aspect of autobiography. She explains that rather than blame the author, the ignorant reader who takes autobiography wholly as a representation of facts should be blamed. Throughout her essay, Elnaggar praises Kingston not for narrating real and verifiable events but for cleverly and artistically engaging in the act of self-exploration through the engagement of her imaginative skills. She further explains that like other genres of literature, the literary success of an autobiography depends on how artistic the author combines style, form, and content to present those events that are fascinating to him/her. She concludes

that Kingston's autobiography is not necessarily a representation of Chinese history and culture and that autobiography cannot be defined within the confines of any statement because:

> Too many questions continue to pose themselves: how can we differentiate fiction from autobiography? What is, after all, fiction? Is it not the inner workings of the mind? Can we ever decide what truth is in autobiography? Why is there an insistence on separating imagination from truth, as if the two were opposite poles of the same spectrum? (196)

Elnaggar's study underscores the need to interpret autobiography in the context of personal experience and cultural roots, which are both mediated through writing and the literary tools available to the writer. Her position reveals the possibilities of interpretations to which autobiography, like the tradition this study proposes, can be subjected to in view of the influences that have shaped the narration.

The inclination to understand the contexts of women's autobiography has borne the critical evaluation of women's autobiographical writings across cultures and geographical locations. This approach has strengthened women's tradition and helped avoid the pitfall of universalism of feminist theories of autobiography. Janet Gunn's intervention exemplifies this approach to the study of women's autobiography. She insists that autobiography, as known in the First world, is different from the Third world. With illustrations drawn from the autobiographies of Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*, and Leila Khaled's *Autobiography of a Revolutionary*, Gunn argues that the lived experiences of these women separate them in theory and practice. According to her, while Dillard conforms to the Western notion of a chronological autobiography that starts from childhood and gives a detailed account of her life, Khaled lacks such details and arrangement in favor of a manifesto-like autobiography. Gunn states:

> For Khaled, it is not to capture an otherwise disappearing past that she writes. Not the cave of private memory but the stage of public performance must be filled; not

> the recovery of the past but the envisioning and revisioning of the future must be undertaken as her life's work. Not to notice but to be noticed. Her agenda, in fact, must be a collective one, the agenda of a woman as well as the agenda of an exiled Palestinian, both gender and politics. (69)

Unlike neutral and leisurely autobiography of the West, Gunn points out the impossibility of a neutral autobiography in an environment and life that is charged with political issues and crises. The Palestinian experience calls for a narrative that will reflect the life and realities of a marginalised group, which is precisely why Khaled cannot indulge in self-reflexivity in her autobiography. Another difference pointed out in Gunn's essay is that in Khaled's text, personal images are absent while the autobiography is laden with the presence of highly political images that seek to "uncover those myths of powerlessness" that have subordinated the Palestinian woman. Finally, according to her, whereas "Annie Dillard writes out of a culture that has a voice, Leila Khaled writes out of a culture of silence" (74). Gunn's essay inaugurates the critical moment that encourages a focus on differences rather than similarities in the development of women's autobiographical practice and theory. Most importantly, her work's relevance to this study is based on the emphasis she places on specific collective national experience as a resource for theorising women's autobiography and as a positive evaluation of the properties of women's autobiography.

Besides literary studies, feminist critics from other disciplines such as philosophy have contributed to the interrogation of male-dominated discourse on the autobiographical identity. In her work, Morwenna Griffiths critically examines from a feminist philosophical standpoint, women's self identity, the unitary "I" in view of factors such as "emotion, rationality, autonomy and authenticity" (5). She discusses female autonomy by looking at the experiences of different groups of women and how they perceive autonomy. She concludes that while it is true that women want to be autonomous in the sense that they want to determine the course of their lives and make

choices, depending on cultural leanings, to different women, being independent to a large extent means not only being able to live the way they want but also to live in co-operation and bond with others. She clarifies this point further:

> if independence—or autonomy—is the freedom to be yourself, to speak for yourself, to determine your own life, in the knowledge that a worthwhile life includes cultural and social bonds, and in the knowledge that such bonds will last during periods of relative need for the help of others and relative responsibility to meet the needs of others. (139)

For her, the female "I" comprises "others" that are as important as self in the construction of an autonomous identity. The book draws materials from personal experiences of those who ordinarily are not considered in mainstream philosophy, the poor, blacks, and women. Even though she does not apply autobiography to the narratives she analyses, her position in the book relates to this study because it centres personal experiences of herself and others in theorising and asserts that such perspectives are useful inasmuch as they are taken through a process of "reflection and re-thinking" in addition to incorporating the politics that produced such experience and perspective. She correctly foregrounds the relevance of lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups in theories of identity.

More recent studies of women's autobiography are geared towards establishing the relationship between autobiography and feminism with a view to showing how both fields of study have influenced each other rather than showing them as opposing fields. In the light of this position, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield have argued that feminism is akin to autobiography because of the interdisciplinary nature of both fields of study and the challenge they pose to traditional conventions and theories. They state that while feminism has impacted autobiographical studies, the involvement of feminist discourse with autobiography has occasioned feminist's reconsideration of its own definitions of "subjectivity, knowledge, and power" (2). As an indication of

these reconsiderations, the essays contributed to the volume are grouped under three headings: genre, intersubjectivity, and memory. In the first section, essayists examine a wide and sometimes unconventional form of autobiographical writing. These include oral life stories of the working class, curriculum vitae, oral history, interviews, and semi-fictional texts.

Carolyn Steedman's contribution to the book is an exploration of an uncharted course of the origin of autobiography. She maintains that modern autobiography has its origins in the self-narratives that are forced out of the working class group and not in the introspective and voluntary acts of self-narration carried out by the bourgeois. She de-emphasises the "written autobiography" and traces major self-narratives not to the elites but "the poor who tell their story, in vast proportion to their vast numbers" as required by their employers in England between 1660 and 1900 (12). Of special interest to her, apart from narratives asked of employees by their employers, are the stories extorted from poor female workers, which centre on "seduction and betrayal", as these women are forced to name the fathers of their illegitimate children who were considered an economic drain on government purse. She suggests that Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or, the Wrongs of Woman* follow the narrative patterns of the workers' life-stories and are examples of "ways in which the narrative of the poor might be used by those in other ranks and orders of society for their own purposes of self-articulation" (13). Steedman intends to show that "self" as articulated in modern autobiography is not the invention of the male elite but poor women whose forced life-stories were told according to the requirements of their employers.

Under the sub-heading, "Intersubjectivities", contributors consider the relatedness between stories told by mothers to daughters and grandmothers to granddaughters in addition to examining the connections between the subjects of each narration.

Intersubjectivity is applied to the relationship between the narrator and audience, in this case, mothers as narrators, and daughters as audience. The editors opine:

> The narration of a life or a self can never be confined to a single, isolated subjecthood. Others are an integral part of consciousness, events and the production of a narrative. Or put more abstractly, the narration of a self cannot be understood in isolation from an other it acknowledges, implicitly or explicitly, and with which it is in a constitutive relationship. (5)

Before arriving at this conclusion, the editors of the volume have assessed the contributions of essayists to the debate on female subjectivity. They are specially drawn to the essay of Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis who discusses the letters of an African-American woman as an autobiographical writing with shifting subjects. According to Etter-Lewis, Evva K. Heath's letters to her mother is a demonstration of the possibility of writing autobiographically and referring at the same time to a subject that may not be concrete but idealised and a representative of a group of subjects. Precisely, Etter-Lewis submits that Evva was as concerned about her conditions as she was about the conditions of blacks in her community of the nineteenth century America, who were faced with stiff and hostile racial segregation. As a result of this concern, Etter-Lewis argues that despite the fact that Evva's was fortunate to have been adopted into the white community with some measure of affluence as a result of her social status, her letters to her mother were punctuated with shifts from the singular subject "I" to the plural and collective "we". In the essayist's opinion, this attitude was emblematic of the African-American realities of the nineteenth century America, and the autobiographer, Evva, finds the depiction of the collective experience vital to the narration of self:

> Evva's shift from privileged 'I' to 'our people', or the self that was part of a collective whole, suggests that she indeed had a sense of racial identity that transcended social class distinctions. This situation reflected the kind of dilemma/challenge that upwardly mobile African-Americans faced on a daily basis: that is, how can the benefits of success be effectively utilized without rejecting one's own race and culture? (45)

According to the investigation of Etter-Lewis, the subject of the letters continued to shift in accordance with changes and advancement in her living conditions and perceptions. In this sense, the combination of race, gender, and social class produced subjects that reflect each level of consciousness. This argument can be used to rationalise the need for theoretical categories which include the peculiar nature of shifting subjects in the face of factors that may influence autobiographical writing. Overall, feminist interventions, from which this study derives its approach and intends to contribute, continue to interrogate universalist assumptions about the genre of autobiography.

Memory is closely linked with intersubjectivity in the volume. This is due to the feminist theory of multiple sources of memory; that no single source can lay claim to memory since the subject of remembrance is in relationship with other subjects that foster and help retrieve memory. Again, the essayists who contribute to this section on memory cite the African-American example. Mary Evans's chapter centres on slavery as a major source of memory for emergent African-American female autobiographer. Evans locates the influence of slave narratives on the form and content of black women's autobiography and opines that the absence of a conclusion, sense of grief and loss, abuse and dehumanising conditions that marked slave narratives are all evident in the autobiographical writings of Harriet Jacobs as well as those of the contemporary writer, Maya Angelou. Feminism has continued to impact the field of autobiography because of the possibilities that are inherent in reading life writing as products of particular contexts and experiences.

2.3 Black Autobiography

Black autobiography refers to autobiography produced by the black peoples of the world. They include black peoples in Africa, America, Caribbean, Asia and other parts of the world. This review focuses mainly on African American because of its

impact on the mainstream theorising of black autobiography. Broadly speaking, African American autobiography derives most of its conventions and forms from slave narratives and by implication, a critical survey of the slave tradition will reveal much about African American autobiography. One of the earliest texts in the tradition of slave narratives, Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gaustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself,* occupies a special place in black autobiography criticism because it functions both as an (ex-) slave narrative and an African autobiography. As a slave narrative, critics have analysed the author's use of personal and collective experiences he had as a slave brought from Africa to England to advocate for the abolition of slavery, showing that insider information can be more powerful than observations made by the outsider. It has also been read as a historical, literary, and religious or spiritual text. In order words, historians, literary, and religion critics have worked on his text bringing out different aspects of the autobiography that serve the purpose of their disciplines. As an African autobiography, critics have explored the author's identity as an African who was uprooted from his home and his depiction of African religion, culture, trade and commerce.

For example, Samantha Earley examines how Equiano uses his subject-narrator position to traverse moral, religious, economic, and cultural spaces to effectively advocate for the abolition of slave trade. She discusses Equiano's discursive strategies and underlines the author's successful manipulation of the generic conventions of autobiography. She points out that as a black man, ex-slave, and Christian convert who has been accepted in the English society, Equiano cleverly speaks against slavery without offending his "Englishness". According to her, his choice of words, comparative analysis of the worlds he has experienced, and the singularity of good from bad people

are some of the techniques he employs. She also argues that because Equiano writes from multiple discourses of authority as an African converted into an Englishman, someone who has experienced slavery, a devout Christian who is well read and travelled, he creates "a voice of his own" not a mimicry of accepted conventions of representing Africans or slavery, "an ideological space wherein he was an individual…" (4). Therefore, as he constructs "self", he deconstructs his otherness by using the "same discourse" used by the Anglo-Americans (to describe the brute Africans) "to undermine colonial narrative and reformulate that culture's notion of 'slave and African" (4). In Earley's analysis, unlike what some other critics have read as a marginalised self, Equiano narrates self through his multiple positions and centres self by speaking as subject with the authority to universalise issues of morality, reinscribe the humanity of Africans, isolate "the bad eggs" engaged in brutal slavery, and the bad Christians who misuse Christianity as an avenue to perpetrate slavery. Black autobiography is as individual as it can be and also collective. Black autobiographers narrate self and speak against issues that affect the black race. And women are not different, the idea that women write only about private and sometime trivial issues may not be totally correct as shown in subsequent chapters, the texts selected for this study demonstrate that gender is not a totalising factor in determining the themes of literary texts.

In recent times, anthologies of slave narratives have been produced in an attempt to ensure that they are included in canonical American autobiography. Anthologies such as Escott's *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth Century Slave Narratives* (1979), Bland Jr.'s three volumes titled *African American Slave Narratives* (2001), Taylor's *I was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives* 1770-1849 (1999), and Gates and Andrews' *The Civitas Anthology of African American Slave Narratives* (1999) are examples of this type of publication.

Of note in the critical reception of slave narratives is Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s critical work *The Slave's Narrative* in the analysis of slave autobiography. This book brings together essays from various fields such as literary studies, anthropology, economics, and sociology, among others, to achieve a double-edged purpose: historical and interpretive study of the tradition. In their introductory chapter, they define slave narrative as "the written and dictated testimonies of the enslavement of black human beings" (2). Their definition lends a voice to the inclusion of personal testimonies in autobiography. The book contains reviews of essays and books that are written on slave narratives prior to 1865. These narratives include both oral and written forms as long as they were produced before slavery was abolished. The authors opine that whatever historiography is to be developed as regards African American literary tradition; the unveiling of slave narratives is pertinent. Of interest to them is what they consider the coming to voice of slaves as a direct reaction to claims made by enlightenment scholars that blacks could not be human beings since they could not write. In a brilliantly and carefully presented argument, they maintain that slaves took up writing their life stories as a weapon to write their humanity and resist the slave holders' discourse in which illiteracy was synonymous with inhumanity. According to Gates, Jr. and Davis, "the slave narratives represent the attempts of blacks to write themselves into being" (xxiii). As mentioned earlier, their work serves dual purposes; to support the idea that any history of a people must take into account writing/narration by the people themselves since no one or group of people could write or construct valid history outside the accounts of the people themselves. The study demonstrates that slave narratives are autobiographies, which are representative of collective experience and also valid and verifiable historical documents about the origin of black people outside Africa.

The second purpose of their book is to establish slave narratives as a precursor of African American literary tradition. In order to achieve this, the authors analyse the language, intentions and effects of slave narratives such as those of Job Ben Solomon, Olaudah Equiano, James Williams, Juan Manzano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacob and oral narratives. Their work is well received in feminist criticism because it does not undermine the contributions of women in the interpretation and delineation of the tradition of slave narrative. However, though it appears to have favoured the works of women, it lumps them together with men's slave narratives and pays no attention to the conditions of women in slavery and their approach to writing autobiography.

From slave writing tradition comes the "neo-slave narratives" which is described by Ashraf Rushdy as "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (3). He examines four autobiographical fictional novels that were written after the intellectual debates of the Black power movement of the nineteen sixties: Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose* (1986), two novels by Charles Johnson, *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990). The study underscores the influence of the debates of the nineteen sixties on these texts. He argues that these texts are literary statements made in response to socio-political history of the nineteen sixties though they were published long after the debates. He is able to delineate a tradition of neo-slave narrative through an examination of the writing strategies of these writers. He draws attention to the use of what he calls "the fugitive slave narrative voice" done in the first-person in these novels, which was being appropriated by white novelists (ibid). Secondly, these texts resist the attempt to remove "firsthand" slave narratives from the canon of American writing. Though he links this tradition with an older one, the contemporaneity of the experience of these writers is enough reason to delineate an

appropriate theoretical paradigm for their interpretation. Whatever purpose these texts serve, what is important to us in this study is that by establishing a tradition called "neo-slave narrative", the likelihood of excluding texts that fall under this category from canonisation will be reduced. This underscores one of the objectives of the study to reinscribe contemporary female voices in the canon of African autobiography.

Williams Andrew and Gates, Jr.'s *The Civitas Anthology of African American Slave Narratives* is a collection of both well known and unknown but important slave narratives. It includes *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself, to Which is Added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa, a Captured African, The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Narrative and of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself and Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: Or, the Escape of William and Ellen Graft from Slavery*, among others.

In the "Preface", Gates, Jr. ascribes the inability of white Americans and some African Americans to fully understand and put in the right perspective the history of slavery to the minimisation of vivid and inhuman treatment meted out to slaves in what constitutes the history of slavery. Since there is no better way to get an insight into this history, the narratives of slaves become very important in the construction of the history of slavery. In other words, as witnesses to the evil of slavery, and people whose life narratives shape history and literary tradition of America, their voices deserve to be heard. He claims that of all the narratives done by slaves, those of African Americans were more outstanding than others. The volume is, therefore, an attempt to bring together these outstanding narratives "that most fully exemplify the genre, in all of its complexity and forms" (ix).

In the introductory chapter of the same book, Andrew reiterates the point made

earlier by Gates, Jr. that slave narratives are the bedrock of African American literary tradition. He explains that from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), influential fictional writers of the African American descent are indebted in one way or another to the slave narrative genre. The editors have included the different forms of these narratives in one book and highlighted the visibility and potency of the narrative voice even in those that were written by whites on behalf of the slave narrators.

One of the most outstanding merits of this book is the publication of Nat Turner's autobiography in the volume. Nat Turner, who was executed in 1831, was the leader of the bloodiest revolt against slavery. His death launched his narrative into literary limelight as the public became interested in his life. As noted by William, Turner's narrative became part of the material of more popular ones like those of Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown who, at various points in their own narration alluded to Turner's experience. Of relevance is the observation made by William about how Turner is able to construct "self" and project a counter-image of blacks in his confession to Thomas Gray who was an unsympathetic Virginian lawyer. According to William, Turner's narrative "challenged this image of the Negro as a constant, lacking the motive or potential for change unless and until factored into the white man's equation" (11), by making clear and direct statements about his mission and motive for the revolt. This point made by William is relevant to this study because it underlines the agency of the autobiographer in speaking for "self" and "others" in her group, since this image projected by Turner of himself is also valid for others like him, slaves and black people.

Fictional autobiography is another avenue used by critics to examine how African Americans have interrogated stereotypes of black identity in America. Thomas

Morgan in his essay, "The City as Refuge: Constructing Urban Blackness in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*", examines the strategies employed by these writers in constructing a positive image of the urban black man. Morgan points out these texts are a counter-discourse to conventional American writing about African Americans because both authors set up fictional canvases which show that it is not correct to portray blacks as being incapable of coping with the intricacies of urban life but that they have been consciously limited to the pastoral in American society and literature. His comparative study shows that Johnson's work is more successful than Dunbar's in the recreation of the urban black identity because of Johnson's use of the autobiographical form. He explains that through the strategy of "re-narration" (10), the autobiographical "I" "disrupts the current configurations used to position African Americans by unearthing a past that rewrites the previous beliefs of his readers" (13). Moreover, Morgan's favourable assessment of Johnson's text goes on:

> Johnson's use of autobiography as a fictional form, his exploitation of what Jacquiline Goldsby calls the "fiction of 'authenticity'" (255) also gives Johnson the space to claim representational control over what is depicted as "experience" in the text. By utilizing the generic codes of autobiography (i.e., the presentation of observational experience rather than the depiction or repetition of established representational types), Johnson is effectively authorized to configure representational notions of blackness within. (13)

Morgan's essay ties with the notion put forward in this study that writing from within as the author-narrator gives an advantage to the narrator that would not be available to the third person narrator. The strength of Morgan's essay lies in his approach to fictional autobiography as an avenue employed by black writers, writing as insiders, to compel their white readers to reconsider their positions about black people. Like its non-fictional counterpart, African women's fictional autobiography attempts to tell some truth about the life of the narrator and the reader is invited to receive this truth as an "authentic"

version of the experiences of the woman-narrator who speaks on behalf of other women against patriarchy.

Critics have also been interested in the demarcation of black women's autobiographical writing, especially African American women's. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese states that a literary tradition is not simply a mediated account of the experience of a particular group. She opines that such a tradition is a combination of the experience of the writer and the strategies of representing it and that the conditions of black women in the United States of America are represented in their autobiographies in such a way that the complexities of the history of slavery, gender, race, and class are negotiated. She explains further that black women's autobiography is different from their white counterpart because unlike white women's autobiography which is devoted to self-reflexive narration, probing of individual emotions, black women's autobiography "seems torn between exhibitionism and secrecy, between self-display and self-concealment" (184). For this reason, according to her analysis, the history of slavery, the social context of the society, and the period of writing are all factors that should be considered in categorising black women's autobiography as a literary tradition. Her argument is in consonance with the proposition made in this study that contemporary African women's autobiography displays some distinct characteristics that should be considered while reading them and in formulating theoretical paradigms for them.

As a follow-up on slave narratives, autobiography in African American literary tradition is a site for articulating ideological and political intentions of individuals who are believed to represent the collective interest of their race. Studies in this tradition show that the issue of identity and collectivity are pivotal to the African American autobiographer. One approach, as that adopted by Kenneth Mostern, considers the black

experience as one that engenders a definition of autobiography, which is different from any definitions that are arrived at through studies in white autobiography. She centres the combination of the trauma of slavery, politics and identity in the understanding of black autobiography and defines autobiography as "an articulation based on the determinate memory and recall of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology, to describe the continuing racialization of politics" (10). She explains that autobiography is a "process" through which the racialized black attempts to produce a different and positive identity from what has been determined by the conditions of trauma and racialization. She also agrees with Gilroy that African American autobiographical practice is the medium by which almost all their political leaders theorize "their political positions" (8). She examines the ideological positions of W.E.B. Dubois, Malcom X, and other leaders through their autobiographies and concludes that black autobiography highlights the powerful influence their life writing has on black identity and political struggles. Her work pioneers recent attempts to locate the black autobiographical voice in the field and its undeniable position as an instrument for racial struggle. Mostern's book exemplifies the distinctiveness of critical works on black autobiography, the growing interest in black autobiographical criticism, and the notion that race among other indices influence life writing as evident in the texts selected for this study.

However, Adetayo Alabi does a more comprehensive study in his groundbreaking work, *Telling Our Stories: Continuities and Divergences in Black Autobiographies* than most books on black autobiography. This is partly because of his transnational and transgendered approach to the criticism of black autobiography. He argues for a re-definition of the properties of the genre in line with the complexities engendered by specifics of cultural contexts and ideological commitments of black

autobiography. Alabi's contribution to the criticism of black autobiography is one of the most recent and very detailed works that focus on the intersections of race and gender in the study of black autobiography. He selects texts from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States of America and examines them based on the premise that they form a community of black autobiographical writing and are "products of specific historical and cultural societies" (5).

These texts include Wole Soyinka's *Ake: Years of Childhood*, Maya Angelo's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself, Sistren's Lionheart Gal: The Life Stories of Jamaican Women*, and Derek Walcott's *Another Life*. He opines that the prevalence of the genre in traditional African societies is one of the reasons for its popularity among black people in modern times. Just as autobiography functions as a repertoire for communal struggles and histories, it is a record of the struggles and resistance of the black race in the face of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, and sexism. He also states that autobiography is used by Africans in and out of the continent as counter-discourse and as records of the activities and political experiences of black people which serve to promote their well- being. Even though he examines written autobiographies by black slaves, activists, and writers, he argues that the insistence of Western critics on the writing component of autobiography is Eurocentric and that he has adopted autobiography even for oral texts because the element of self-life-narration is not absent but present in oral narratives.

His argument for the inclusion of oral narratives in the corpus of autobiography is strategic because he later proves that autobiography is neither foreign to Africa nor

entirely a communal enterprise as Olney likes to argue. He maintains that it is in consonance with imperial discourse that critics like Susan Anderson claim a Western origin for autobiography. Alabi draws examples from Yoruba oral literature to explore the autobiographical in folktales, epics, witches' and wizards' confessions, religious testimonies and praise poems. He succeeds in his attempt to establish an oral antecedent to black autobiography and forges a definition of black autobiography as "life-stories by people of African descent about their lives and their communities" (18).

His work is significant and related to this study because of his insistence that oral antecedents, with the socio-cultural nuances they carry, are strong influences on black autobiography. He interprets otherness in black autobiography as a heritage of the communal disposition of blacks whereby the individual identifies with the struggles and achievements of the community and the life story of the individual is also that of the community. Also important is Alabi's position on "race and blackness" as significant markers of autobiographies of Africans, African Americans, and Caribbeans. For Alabi, black people's ideological movements such as Negritude, Black Power Movement, and even theoretical positions articulated in postcolonial theory are tools and methods of resisting preexisting and existing stereotypes and constructions of blackness. According to him, when black people privilege the name "black", they are not only writing with others like them globally but also identifying "with their African roots that colonialism undervalues" (21). Of note is the fourth chapter of the book, "Caliban, Is That You?: Slave Narratives and the Politics of Resistance", where he argues that the autobiographies of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Fredrick Douglass are a counter-discourse to the image of the muted black character in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Caliban. He captures the empowering capability of the combination of race, agency of these autobiographers as subjects of their own narratives, their control over discursive

strategies, and the common goal of resisting slavery within the communal framework of African ideology. He underscores the depiction of cultured and organised black societies, especially in Equiano's autobiography, as a deliberate attempt to "write back" to colonial discourse on the barbaric and uncouth Caliban.

Although he consistently points out convergences in these autobiographies, he does not fail to emphasise the differences as a result of personal experiences, choice of narrative style, and particularly, difference in gender. He singles out Mary Prince's autobiography as a narrative of sexual abuse, one with a heightened gendered experience, which cannot be accounted for by a male-authored slave autobiography. He asserts that while the male slaves only witnessed the abuse of the female slave, Mary Prince is a victim and a "participant" whose story further authenticates the inhumanity of slaveholders and the call for the abolition of slavery. Alabi's work resonates with the need for a more gendered study of African autobiography and critical assessment of the autobiographical practice of women as distinct from men.

2.4 African Autobiography

It is not out of place to say that autobiography is one of the earliest and commonest genres in African literature. Patricia Geesey's comment in the introduction to a journal volume on African autobiography substantiates this point. She states that autobiography cannot be ignored in the study of African literature and that the political and social realities of the continent are well represented in first person narratives. Though as she has rightly observed that autobiography, as first person narrative, cannot be ignored in African literature, more often than not the field has been overshadowed by the other literary genres. Critics mostly refer to the autobiographical voice in literary productions but do not give adequate attention to studying autobiography as a literary genre on its own. Even notable academic journals of African literature have not been

devoting editions to autobiography as much as they do for poetry, prose and drama. *Research in African Literatures* for instance has only so far in the past twenty years published one edition on autobiography, which is titled "Autobiography and African Literature". It is in the introductory part of the journal that Geesey comments on the primacy of autobiography in African literature. She also draws attention to the fact that the study of autobiography in African literature coincides with the growth of "-isms", namely, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminism, which is one of the reasons for consciously or unconsciously featuring women's autobiographical criticism in the edition. The contributions of Julia Watson, Nicki Hitchcott, Carmela Garritano, and Lisa McNee are in a way tribute to the explosion of feminist criticism of African literature in the nineteen-nineties. Their essays are reviewed under "African Women's Autobiography" in this study since they are essentially about the intervention of women writers in the field of autobiography.

However, autobiography has been a major preoccupation of critics of South African literature, particularly few years before the end of apartheid and the beginning of democratic rule up till the present times. Critics have been interested in the art of black South Africans in writing life stories, which are counter-discursive narratives to official stories about the political struggles during apartheid. Thomas Thale states that working class autobiographies are pungent political statements in which authors' identities are closely tied to their political convictions. He examines Clement Kadalie's *My Life and the ICU* (1970), Naboth Mokgatle's *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African* (1971), Emma Mashinini's *Strikes Have followed Me All My Life* (1989), and Alfred Qabula's *Cruel Beyond Belief* (1989) as negotiations of subjecthood in conformity with the professions and commitments of these writers as activists and unionists. Thale points out that although they all portray stable childhood and past, they

still feel a sense of loss and limited accomplishment in life as a result of some deficiencies in their family structure. According to him, they nonetheless find stability in the path of activism and unionism, which is for most of these autobiographers, "pivotal to the development of self and provides as structural framework for the narrative on the self" (614). In other words, their lives are built around the histories of their various unions and their roles as leaders and participants in the struggle against apartheid. Thale's essay demonstrates the peculiar nature of autobiographical writing in South Africa, that individual life story of blacks cannot be divorced from the larger struggle against the common foe "apartheid". In fact, the image of a "rebellious self" is always presented in these autobiographies and the narrators show a conscious effort at rewriting official histories, which play down oppressive and dehumanising acts of the state and labour employers in apartheid South Africa (622). Since this essayist draws attention to the influence of the collective aspirations on the autobiographers and the effect of the various exposures these narrators acquired as a result of their participation in union activities on the construction of "self", his work agrees with one of the objectives of this study to show that "self" is constructed according to some sets of hidden or known influences.

South African autobiographical practice can be divided into two types, the oral and the written. Like in most oral cultures of Africa, critics maintain that the oral tends to place more emphasis on the influence of the community on the narrator or poet than on the development of an "isolated self" within the community. In addition, critics point to the influence of the oral performance on the written autobiography. Judith Coullie's study for example shows how *Izibongo* has continued to co-exist with written autobiography in contemporary South Africa. She explores convergences and differences in both forms of autobiographical practice and shows that both are results of

a “desire to fix, to define a self and to achieve a measure of permanence and immutability in the interpretation of identity” (62). She notes that during apartheid, South Africans produced large numbers of autobiography, particularly written, because they wanted others to be informed about their conditions and share their visions with their readers. Coullie’s discussion of differences between *izibongo* and what she calls “narrative autobiography” includes difference in composition, participation of audience/reader, and shifts in pronoun in *izibongo* among others. Due to the private nature of written autobiography, Coullie suggests that the author is the one who authenticates his/her story while the live audience whose comments are structured into the praise authenticates the oral autobiographer’s story. According to her, in narrative autobiography, the author tactically achieves artistic aesthetic by deliberately keeping the reader in suspense and at once “revealing and withholding” “private truths” as s/he wills. Whereas *izibongo*, the oral autobiography,

> is a statement of identity in community, its appeal lying in social anchoring and the pleasures of performance for the performer, whether that be the subject of the poem or not, and the auditors. Instead of a developmental depiction of character, of a self split between the private, interiorised ‘real’ and the public persona, the self in oral poetry is addressed as a knowable, stable and unified entity. The subject is hailed, interpellated, known, through praises to him/herself and to members of the community. Instead of an economy of personal revelation, of individualised confession, oral forms rely on communalism, on shared knowledge and ritual, on conformity and concord. (72)

It is important to note that Coullie’s analysis of oral autobiography defies the western notion of the private tendency of autobiography and the much debated “lies” and “truth” in autobiography. The live audience, by her analysis, serves as a check or regulating body to the autobiographer who may not be able to indulge in “fictions” about “self” because on-the-spot verifications are likely to occur in performance. Coullie’s study brings to the fore an important aspect of the role of the community in constructing the autobiographical “self”, which has not been adequately discussed in African

autobiography. Another aspect of African autobiography, which she highlights, is the role of the spiritual in self-narration. She attests to the fact that the two systems of the secular and the religious/spiritual are properly merged in African autobiography unlike Western autobiography which seeks to portray a secular and empirical "self", in line with Foucault's assertion that "only rational and secular principles can lead to authenticated 'truth'" with little or no attention given to the spiritual in the narrative (76).

Apart from showing the spiritual undertones of African autobiography, Coullie also captures the hybrid nature of the tradition by discussing the mixture of both African and Western cultures in the autobiographies of Nelson Mandela, Ellen Kuzwayo, and some South Africans. She opines that Africans have imbibed literacy and have not ignored or abandoned orality as a medium of narrating "self" in contemporary South Africa. She concludes that it might be difficult to predict the literary outcome of the interactions between the written and oral in African autobiography but that "African beliefs, practices, ways of being, are likely to survive (in ever changing forms) the globalisation of capitalism and the onslaught of American-European hegemony, at least in the short term" (83). Her essay marks an epoch in the study of African autobiography because she clearly demonstrates an awareness of the unsuitability of strict dichotomies of Western and African autobiographies but shows the various underlying conditions and realities that necessitate a co-operative study of both in African literature. In agreement with Coullie's position, this study does not seek to "tear" African women's autobiography from Western tradition but to show the various factors that have shaped the practice and can also engender theoretical category.

Autobiographical writing in Kenya can be grouped under two major categories; religious and political. Both forms intertwine in most autobiographies of Kenyan

nationalists and Christian converts. Derek Peterson in his essay “Casting Characters: Autobiographical Writings in Central Kenyan”, laments the inadequate attention given to autobiographies of Kenyans in literary circles. The fiction emanating from this part of Africa seems more attractive to critics than autobiographies, which according to Peterson are largely regarded as a body of written evidence. Peterson examines the autobiographies of a Kenyan cleric, Rev. Charles Muhoro, and a female political activist, Cecilia Muthoni Mugaki. He disproves the notion/assertion that autobiographies written in vernacular only parody the interests of the people and not those of individual autobiographers. His argument is useful if one considers the distinctiveness individuals bring into the understanding of autobiography by focusing not on what the people agree on politically but what an individual considers important to him or her. Peterson also underlines this point by positioning the autobiographies of two Gikuyu as indicators of the controversy among this ethnic group as regards how communal life ought to be represented in writing. in the concluding paragraph of his essay, he states that these two autobiographies “do not betray an underlying unity of purpose.Gikuyu were never of one mind about their culture or their politics.”

If compared with the position of Remy Oriaku, it is clear that African autobiographies are not always collective or exclusively individual, as critics may want to argue. Oriaku asserts that though the subject lives in a community with others, he will constantly be aware that he “exists alone and with others” and that he is only a hero in a drama in which the community stars (27). Oriaku’s point suggests that the individual’s life story is subordinate to the story of the community, which is why, the community “stars” in individual’s autobiography. He romanticises the role of the community in the life story of the autobiographer whereby the autobiographer “celebrates and shows reverence for the ways of life of his people and ancestors” (28). He goes further to say

that one of the accomplishments of an African, specifically Nigerian autobiographer like Buchi Emecheta is to "help debunk prejudices against his class or group" (28). As an Igbo critic from South East Nigeria, Oriaku is aware of the stifling patriarchy that obtains in that region, against which Emecheta has written both in her autobiography and fiction. In other words, rather than enshrining oppressive communal values and practices, the autobiographer may indeed be alone in the fight against such a system.

However, Oriaku's comments on the role of individual autobiographer in determining the course of narration and the supremacy of this singular voice over the communal, agree with the purpose and methodology of this study to demarcate distinct poetics of contemporary African women's autobiography. Oriaku points out that Olney's disparate choice of texts examined might have been informed by the idea that the autobiographers all relate "African stories". It seems Olney's interest in that book is only to show that when Africans write autobiographies, they are writing their communities. Oriaku helps us to understand that the technique of representing experiences and events contained in an autobiography is as important as the experiences and events of the individuals who write them. It also demonstrates that African autobiography is not equal to "ethnography" as Olney claims. Individual narrators determine the course of the narration and the role of the community in it and not the other way round.

While Oriaku tackles Olney's and some other Western studies of African autobiography, Tony Afejuku in "Cultural Assertion in the African Autobiography" examines the themes of African autobiography and infers that autobiographers are preoccupied with the projection of African cultural practices and values in their life narratives. The essay features six autobiographies fairly well spread over the geographical zones of the continent. It includes Camara Laye's *The African Child*, two

Kenyan authors, Mugo Gatheru's *Child of Two Worlds* and Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, from South Africa is Naboth Mokgatle's *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*, from Sierra Leone, Robert Wellsley Cole's *Kossoh Town Boy* and Nigeria's Wole Soyinka's *Ake: Years of Childhood*. Early in the essay, Afejuku asserts that one of the aims of African autobiography is to reconstruct the African past, values and culture and present them, for the purpose of preservation, in writing, to younger generations, thereby agreeing with Olney's position that African autobiographers write their communities.

Along this line of argument, he examines aspects of traditional African life that are recalled by these writers. These are rites of birth, initiation into adulthood, the relationship between the dead ancestors and the living descendants, the interaction between individuals and communities and with their environment, the role of the priest and artist in the community and lastly, the naming of children. According to his analysis, the authors conform to communal living patterns and beliefs by speaking for cultural practices and highlighting them as important landmarks in their own lives. For example, Mugo Gatheru and Camara Laye both devote several pages of their narratives to describing the rites performed during their initiation ceremonies. Though a painful experience, they recall them in their narration thereby attesting to the communal definition of maturity and belonging.

Besides this, their autobiographies also become a medium for linking this aspect of their communal cultural practice with generations yet unborn. The spiritual oeuvre of traditional African community is marked by the presence of ancestors who are always relevant in the day-to-day lives of the people. Citing Soyinka's autobiography, Afejuku states that the blending of *egungun* mask performances with Christian services is a deliberate attempt by Soyinka to show that the ancestors, represented by *egungun* are

never shut out of the sphere of the living. Also, the inclusion of Bukola's story in the narration goes beyond the mythical representation of the "child which is born dies, and is born again and dies in a repetitive circle" (quoting *Ake* 17), but according to Afejuku, is a metaphor that signifies the interwoven life of the dead and the living, which is a major belief of the community in reincarnation. He says further that this part of the autobiography "is a manifestation of a communal consciousness, a communal experience, which embraces not only Soyinka's generation but generations to come as well" (6).

Afejuku's essay is cardinal to the conceptualisation of African autobiography for two reasons. First, at the time his essay was published, existing critical works on African autobiography did not delineate an African autobiography. The closest to delineating a tradition is Olney's coinage of the term "ethnography" meaning life narratives of Africans with a twist of the collective or communal life. Other works were mainly regional, focusing particularly on South African autobiography because of the socio-political milieu generated by apartheid, which in turn accounted for the profuse life writing efforts of activists involved in the struggle against apartheid. Another reason why this essay is important is because of the choice of autobiographies he examines. Camara Laye, Wole Soyinka, Jomo Kenyatta, and Mugo Gatheru are notable writers, nationalists and political activists whose life experiences are closely tied to their respective national interests and indeed the promotion of traditional African culture. Since the autobiographies are spread over Africa, each one can be said to represent his region and nation and can be regarded to a certain extent as representative African voice. However, the omission of women from this essay deprives the work of the dynamics that gender brings into the whole question of African culture as portrayed in autobiographical writing.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that published autobiographies of important and influential African figures have drawn more critical gaze than those of ordinary Africans who in their own way have been involved in autobiographical practice. Perhaps, the one of the few available works on the latter type of autobiography is Karin Barber's *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*. Although Barber does not name her work under autobiography *per se*, she creates a new terminology and genre under autobiography, which she calls "tin-trunk texts" in her introduction. The essays presented in the volume examine from different but related approaches personal life writings of individuals in colonial Africa. These essays recognise "tin-trunk texts" as a genre of autobiographical writing that possesses its own structural configurations. In the "Introduction", Barber submits that this genre is a product of an unnoticed and unsung class of people in colonial Africa who did not go beyond primary education but were still employed as teachers, clerks, catechists, traders and artisans. Their distinct autobiographical practice according to her is a strategy for traversing social class and entering into the domain and discourse of colonial officialdom. Essayists, in the volume, support the notion that autobiographical practice in colonial Africa can best be read and understood within the socio-political context of its practice and that it challenges Enlightenment theory of autobiography as a personal introspection of great men. Ranging from letters to diaries, the texts investigated in the book all attest to the use of autobiography for reconstructing subjectivity and preserving familial, communal and personal histories.

Although the book does not cover autobiographical practice in colonial Francophone Africa, it is still very helpful in understanding how men and women organised their life narratives in colonial times. The opening essay in the collection best illustrates the appropriation of the written autobiography by Africans both to fulfil

religious injunction and personal needs or motives. Miescher's "My Own Life": A.K. Boakye Yiadom's Autobiography-The Writing and Subjectivity of a Ghanaian Teacher-Catechist" is a concise exposition of how A.K. Boakye negotiates the public and private space in autobiography to achieve his personal aim of preserving his life story for generations to come. Though the autobiography is contained in two volumes of handwritten notebooks, it does through subtle means reveal the multiple subjectivities of the autobiographer. Miescher considers "the text's principal persona and explores Boakye Yiadom's motives, models, and intended audience". He claims that the exposure of Yiadom to the diary by the Presybetarian clergy and tutors is responsible for the format in which events are recorded in the text. Interestingly, against the Christian teachings he has been exposed to, Yiadom maintains a diary not for self examination that leads to repentance, as prescribed by the church, but to keep a record of his life for pedagogic purpose, to teach his progeny how to live and how not to live. Generally, one gets the impression from Miescher's work that in form and content, African autobiography differs from Western autobiography.

Miescher presents us with two separate identities constructed by Yiadom. One is about the faithful follower of Christ who has one wife and keeps a religious journal. The other is embedded in the second volume of Yiadom's autobiography, which contains details of his many wives and concubines and chronicles unchristian activities like the visit of, and the performance of, the diviner in the diary. The essayist argues that a fundamental innovation brought into autobiographical practice by the life narrative of Yiadom is the performance of his autobiography to his children. According to Miescher this performance is patterned after the Akan practice of storytelling in which the audience is entertained by stories about the trickster character, Kwaku Ananse. In the same way, Yiadom performs his autobiography to amuse his audience. Miescher's essay

sheds light on African autobiographical practice because he foregrounds the influence of oral literary practice on the written form. It also reinforces Afejuku's argument that African autobiography is a tradition that celebrates African culture and the need as put forward in this research that there is an African cultural past evident in African autobiography.

Critics of African autobiography as shown in the preceding review have always been interested in the motive writers have for engaging in the practice. This may be because there is a direct relationship between form and intent when looking at autobiographical texts. Forms such as memoirs, letters and diaries are variants of autobiography, which are adopted by practitioners in various ways. Breckenridge's paper, "Reasons for Writing: Working-Class Letter-Writing in Early Twentieth Century South Africa" provides an appropriate exposition of this critical issue in African autobiography. Breckenridge ascribes the prodigious letter-writing habit of migrant working-class South Africans (mainly male) to the need they had to manage economic resources of their homes while away and reply requests from their wives, and mothers for financial assistance. These letters served as medium for expressing emotional and economic needs of the workers who were far from home. On the part of the family members, especially the mothers and wives, according to his findings, letter writing was a way of reminding these workers of their commitment back home. Most relevant to this study is Breckenridge's exploration of this genre of autobiography to represent deep emotions and constitute or represent personal experience in unique ways. The essay infers that despite heavy censorship by authorities, the workers and their relatives found letter-writing a tool for self-representation. The implication for the criticism of African autobiography is that rigid compartmentalisation of autobiography or dogmatic definition of the term as it applies to texts that can be considered autobiography might

be inappropriate for the practice in Africa due to the peculiarities of historical and social experiences of the continent, which have influenced the forms of autobiographical writing embraced by authors.

Alison Rice's book, *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Autobiographical Writing From the Maghreb* is another notable contribution to contemporary studies of African autobiography including women's autobiographical writing. It examines the diverse but similar modes of autobiographical writings found in the corpus of African writers from the Maghreb. In a well-articulated argument, Rice focuses on the writings of three prominent French writers, two of whom are women, Helene Cixous, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Assia Djeba and the influence of their geographic origin, personal experience and national history on their autobiographical works. Her study is done through the application of musical analytical terminologies to the interpretation of their critical and fictional writing. Rice applies the term "Time Signatures" to show that their writing is in a constant flux, always evolving and that they "play with words and their meanings, inserting plurality and multiplicity into their texts in polyphonic autobiographical works" (21). Rice's work supports the focus of this study in that it does not seek to highlight convergences as reason for grouping certain writers or works together, but it recognises that differences call for closer reading in order to bring out hidden sources that might have influenced them. Rice introduces us to a common influence in the works of these authors, Jacques Derrida, whom she claims is present in direct reference, thinking, and theoretical positions espoused by the trio in their autobiographical practice. She states that although there are many reasons that can be alluded to for equating these writers with one another, the thrust of her study is not to emphasise their similarities but to explore their differences as a basis for closer reading

of these authors in order to reveal hidden paratextual presences that demarcate their writing.

As attested to by other critics of African autobiography, religion plays an important role in the life writing enterprise of African autobiographers. Women autobiographers, particularly, have paid special attention to the re-interpretation of holy creeds or books, which have been used to subjugate women and keep them in a position of subordination. Alison reasons that Djeba's success as an Islamic feminist writer is owed to her ability to provide "countersignatures", in Derridian terms, to oppressive patriarchal cultural interpretation of the Qur'an through a rereading of Islamic principles on women and still maintain her Islamic faith. Rice shows that the "offbeat" in Djeba's work is actually the centralisation of these official slips in her narrative, done "in order to bring out different rhythms and tease out other truths, whether personal or communal" (190). Djeba restores lost voices of women and the poor in history by blending them with hers, giving them voice through writing and balancing the past with the present in order to portray her hope in the future.

For Rice, Cixous' inclusion of other voices in her works as exemplified by one of the many plays she has revived at the Theatre du Soleil, stems from Cixous' belief that "the stories of others make us up" and that space should also be created for the unsung stories of refugees and the voiceless in the society (221). In Chapter Six of the final part, Rice brings to the fore the dislocation of the other two writers, Assia Djeba and Abdelkebir Khatibi as a recurring theme in their works. Rice brilliantly argues that for these two, particularly, Khatibi, being in constant travel, at the margins, allows them to continually explore new experiences and blend them with old ones to produce works that portray multicultural and multilingual identities. Rice opines that Khatibi transcribes, transposes personal experiences acquired during numerous travels into his

texts, marking his narratives with “silence and shouts” against injustices and oppressions they notice on his way. Rice infers that in Cixous, Khatibi and Djeba’s writing, there is a “murmur”, as in a “musical hum” that foregrounds their multicultural and multilingual experiences (308).

“Cadenza” is the conclusion of the study. Here, Rice summarises her critical enterprise and demonstrates that the autobiographical works of these three Maghrebian writers move beyond “confession” to testify to the inapplicability of rigid compartmentalisation to their writing. Therefore, she submits that not only does their writing demand new and appropriate terminologies, as a testimony, their autobiographical practice “signals a commitment, a dedication, and an acceptance of profound responsibility toward a community, toward an entity that extends beyond the self” (321). Rice’s study provides a new approach to the study of autobiographical writing, especially as products of postcolonial subjects and dislocated writers. She ruptures the conventionalities of truth, legitimacy and authenticity in life writing by proposing that the right question to ask when reading autobiographical texts is not “where does it fit but why does it not fit?” In a provocative and detailed intertextual study of these writers, Rice appropriates musical interpretive modes into the study of autobiographical writing. She advances the study of autobiography by expanding its forms to include both literary and theoretical works of these writers. With this approach, she is able to fill in gaps in author’s worldview, theory and practice and harmonise these variables as indices of autobiographical writing. Rice’s book is useful in interpreting autobiographical writing of postcolonial African writers irrespective of gender and sexuality.

2.5 African Women's Autobiography

While a tradition of black women's autobiography has since emerged in critical circles, there has not been a conscious attempt to inaugurate what can be considered to be a tradition of African women's autobiography. This is due partly to the disjointed and regionalised studies of this set of autobiographical productions and probably the assumption that existing traditions suffice for the study of African women's autobiography.

In her essay, "The Self Is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography", Ellen Peel examines Doris Lessing's *Going Home* as an autobiography that is almost not autobiographical. She argues that although Lessing writes in the first person, the story that is somehow about herself, the narration is so impersonal and is stripped of the pungent presence of the autobiographer at major points in the narration. Lessing is a South African woman who writes as a journalist more interested in analysing the socio-political experience of Southern Rhodesia during the apartheid years. In Peel's analysis, it seems Lessing has her own idea of autobiography separate from traditional definition or characteristics of autobiography. Peel's comments are founded on the premise that an autobiography must be about an individual who presents a chronological story of her development, maturity, and attainment of greatness in the first person singular pronoun. However, according to her, Lessing follows an approach which she labels "avoidance pattern, almost getting there" (2). By this label, Peel shows that Lessing's narrative never gets to the autobiographical mode because it is more about "other" people than "self". Another reason put forward by Peel is that the narrative concentrates more on describing scenery, places, and physical structures than on events that take place. This approach gives the text the impersonal tone, which in Peel's opinion disqualifies it from being regarded as a "full" autobiography.

Peel's essay is central to one of the theoretical approaches of this study because she examines Lessings treatment of "self" and "other". Peel considers Lessing's autobiography a departure from traditional autobiography because she blurs the difference between these two, "self and other". Peel asserts, "Her way of bridging the chasm between the two is to decide that no such absolute chasm exists. For her, the self is always an other…" (5). She explains that Lessing does this by insisting that one cannot write about a unique self, what you are or are doing, has been done by some "others". Peel's conclusion is that Lessing's theory of otherness is derived from the feminist theories, which are sceptical of "selfhood" and that Simone de Beauvoir's theory of female otherness in the patriarchal discourse particularly applies to Lessing's text and women's autobiography at large:

> Often women share this patriarchal ideology and therefore feel painful ambivalence toward self, experiencing it partly as otherness. On the more positive side, however, this experience makes some women sensitive to what otherness feels like and teaches them to emphasize respect and reciprocity in dealing with people who are in some way "other" in relation to the self. Thus feminist theorists in general value otherness. (11)

Though to a certain extent, Peel's position on the feminist concept of otherness is valid, she does not pay much attention to the possibility of separating self from oppressive "other". Critics have since pointed out that African autobiographers consider "self" as an integral part of "others" and particularly the South African experience is a collective one for blacks, and also for whites and, therefore, Lessing does not refer to this experience as being unique to her but to the white community to which she belongs.

Nicki Hitchcott also explores the feminist temperament in three autobiographies of Senegalese women, Aoua Keita's *Femme d'Afrique*, Ken Bugul's *Le baobab Fou*, and Nafissatou Diallo's *De Tilene au Plateau*. Hitchcott redefines autobiography to read, "the writing of one's own "herstory"; the story of one's life written by herself"

(17). She changes “history” to “herstory” and “himself” to “herself”, without concealing the aim of her essay, to show that though these women are Africans, they rebel against writing conventions of traditional autobiography and the traditions of their people. She disagrees with Alain Fresco’s critique of Keita and Bugul’s texts, that they lack aesthetic qualities and are mere historical documents that can be used to understand the transitional Senegalese societies of their time.

Hitchcott argues that although these authors blend form with content, they still privilege the latter over form, an act that confirms their feminist approach to autobiography because in her opinion, “the rejection of aesthetics becomes a political act: a renunciation of the ostensibly objective criteria of the male-dominated canon, and a promotion of the subjective experience of an individual woman” (18). According to her, these women’s individuality is situated within the feminist concept of the term in which the “individual self” is a part of the “larger, collective identity” (16). In recognition of their collective identity, Hitchcott brilliantly groups these autobiographers together as “types” that transgress tradition, female stereotypes, and venture into masculine space and attitude in general. Moreover, their life writing shows that rather than bond with other women who accept traditions uncritically, they oppose them with the intention of emphasising their otherness. Her critical examination of these autobiographies as feminist texts is appropriate and helps in understanding the antecedent to the texts that are selected for this study. Hitchcott’s fascination with the texts is derived from the distinct strategy of self-representation in the texts she has selected, in which traditional conventions of lineality, subtleness, self-reflexivity, and intimacy are clearly nullified. Her argument substantiates the need for a tradition of African women’s autobiography as a distinct category of women’s writing.

Mary-Kay Miller focuses on literary autobiographical texts of selected Francophone writers to argue that autobiography, like colonialism, is driven by the same desire to project oneself onto an exterior "other" through life narrative and structures of colonialism respectively. She discusses the works of Mariama Ba, Marguerite Duras, and Aminata Sow Fall in order to explore how they appropriate both "repressive and liberating powers of reproduction" in constructing female subjectivity (12). She insists that although feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva project the process of reproduction as being disadvantageous to women, these writers have exploited the advantage of the female agency in reproduction to enter into the creative space. According to Miller, French colonialism reproduced French patterns and cultural structures through education in the colonies and produced new "truth" identities of the colonised that sought to erase older, traditional and existing ones (35). In the light of this, autobiography in the sense of being a colonising force, writes "self over other selves" since it occupies the position of subject. She explains further that because traditional autobiographical practice and theorisation excluded women, women autobiographers have had to reshape the structure of autobiography by writing self not as superior or dominating other but in relation to other. Her position here sheds more light on why women's autobiographies have consistently resisted the conventions for which autobiography is known or identified with. So then, for colonised and oppressed groups, autobiography is empowering because it allows for the deconstruction of existing colonial structures and images of the colonised and at the same time enables the reconstruction of new identities that are most likely to be in consonance with the reality of such groups.

Lisa McNee's study of Senegalese women's autobiographical discourse provides a contemporary interpretation of women's discourse in autobiographical practice. She

examines *taasu,* the poetry performed by women along with the exchange of gifts during baptisms and naming ceremonies. She challenges three major approaches to the study of African autobiography. The first is that by examining a form of autobiography that does not derive from any western form, she argues that her study "seeks to present an African form of autobiographical discourse that cannot be considered a mere tributary to the western autobiographical form" (8). She also presents oral texts performed by these women that illustrate the point that individualism is not a Western concept and that Africans, or better still, African women express their freedom by speaking for themselves, not as a group but as individuals. She faults Olney's theory of essentialising and collectivising African autobiographical practice in *Tell me Africa*. She states: "Olney's attempt to reconcile the singular with the collective leads to an unfortunate conflation of the two. He assumes that cultural reality in Africa is a monolithic, unchanging, and ahistorical entity" (16).

McNee posits emphasises that African identities are not always collective or static, that they can be individualistic and are certainly always evolving and changing. *Taasu*, according to McNee, celebrates womanhood, motherhood and female bonding. Citing some taasu performances, she explains that it is not always the case that womanhood is inseparable from motherhood in African settings. She opines that the image of the ideal woman in some of these *taasu* is that of a female that relates well with her husband and members of her husband's family. Her point here substantiates the one she made earlier that although the community provides the framework for individual identity, communal identity is not synonymous with individual identity. Indeed, these women's autobiographical performance of "mother" is self-expressive and directed at changing national and communal identity. They engage in discourses of nation building

and they represent motherhood as an avenue for transforming a former French colony into a modern state that is functional and beneficial to its citizens.

By highlighting this aspect of *taasu* performance, McNee demonstrates the modern approach of the autobiographical performance and the relevance of the oral with written texts in postcolonial settings. Her study is basically informed by an intersubjective mode of interpreting autobiography because she reconstructs individuality in the light of the exchange between individuals and others, thereby concluding that rather than portray a static image of individual identity, it is in a constant dialogue with the community and as such changes in the community have implications for individual identity. Her position helps in understanding the effects of national historical experience on individual identity and makes space for remodelling theories of autobiography to reflect these changes.

Miller's recent contribution to African women's autobiographical study is the closest to the focus of this study in terms of concentrating on female writers and the innovative strategies they employ in constructing "self". As reflected in the title of her book, *(Re)productions: Autobiography, Colonialism, and Infanticide*, Miller discusses how the works of Mariama Ba, Aminata Sow Fall, and Marguerite Duras produce new versions of the concept of reproduction in a (post)colonial African context through the autobiographical form of writing. Because of the relevance of Miller's methodology and findings to this study, a detailed discussion of the book will be carried out in subsequent paragraphs. Although the book concentrates on the works of three Francophone women writers, namely Thomas Mpoyi-Bautu of Zaire, Nafissatou Diallo of Senegal, and Aoua Keita of Mali, it incorporates the works of a nineteenth century writer, Pierre Loti, into the study. She reads these texts as intertexts and applies feminist, postmodernist, postcolonial and cultural theories to the narrative style and concerns.

She explains that in order to understand the background, from which female writers engage colonial and postcolonial issues in their texts, there is a need to build a conceptual framework for reproduction as it relates with production. In her opinion, both terms represent aspects of each other, even though production is viewed as being superior to reproduction. Reproduction is stripped of originality because it only re-echoes the inventions of production. If this is applied to women's traditional role of reproduction and the literary endeavour of women writers, then it becomes problematic. Again, it is even more problematic if this framework is applied to autobiography. She opines that in the recent past, the genres of poetry and fiction were regarded as inventions or productions (because of their literariness), while autobiography is "considered as an imitation or reproduction of actual events, … and has generally been accorded a lesser literary status" (6). Using Marxist terms, she interprets reproduction as the capitalist invention by which the "wage-labourer is created and reproduced" through a continual exchange of labour for wages. She further explains that this discourse became domesticated at the point at which Marx extended reproduction to mean the process through which "[t]he worker and the working class are also "reproduced" in the form of offspring to whom skills are transferred" (6). She argues that Engel and Georg Gugelberger both systematically devalue reproductive labour and African literature respectively because they equate the former with the feminine and the latter with the political. For Gugelberger to have lauded Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembene Ousmane for being preoccupied with the political rather than aesthetics, Miller opines that he has fallen into the category of those who agree to the "polarization of politics and aesthetics" (8).

For the feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir, reproduction is that debilitating biological role assigned to women, which perpetuates their subjugation. Miller contrasts

this position with that of Irigaray who contends that the problem is not with reproduction but with female subjugation, which stems from how reproduction "has been represented, evaluated, and finally used to shape female identity that contributes to feminine oppression" (12). Miller reads Julia Kristeva's theory that the problem lies with the repression of the realities of maternity by the elevation of the Virgin Mary, and her separation from "every real mother" in order to deny the "inevitability of death" (12). In other words, reproduction's potency lies in its ability to remind us of something we would rather forget. From these three feminist theorists, Miller launches into her discussion of the texts, underlining the ambivalence of reproduction as a "repressive" and "liberating" force.

Miller identifies the strength and undoing of French colonial policy in the reproduction of French culture and education in its colonies. She illustrates the effects of French education on traditional structures by examining Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre* as an epistolary autobiography that adequately reveals how French system of education reproduced in Senegal is used to engender a "subversive discourse" which is critical about this form of education. Miller proposes in her study that traditional autobiography and colonialism converge in French colonial policy of reproduction. This is because, according to her, "an author's desire to narrate the "story" of her/himself necessitates the creation of an object exterior to itself", is the same desire of the "French colonial project, where in order to narrate itself, to inscribe the grandeur of its civilization, France needed to project itself into something exterior to it" (34). She goes further by explaining that while both traditional autobiography and the state strive to produce a unified, truthful, and coherent subject in its narratives, contemporary autobiography breaks itself from this mould by projecting a fragmented subject that need not be true to its referent. Using Pierre Loti's autobiographical fiction as an illustration

of a colonising narrative with a fragmented subject and negative image of the other, Miller insists that Loti's quest for adventure is motivated by a desire to "inscribe his own image" in those places (38). Marguerite Duras' autobiographical writing, in Miller's opinion, disrupts traditional autobiographical conventions through a depiction of indecipherable subjects whose life narratives do not position others in opposition to self but as part of the writing self. The success of Duras' writing as a reply to colonial misrepresentation of the native stems from her astute "manipulation of autobiography works to undermine Loti's model for self that colonizes, imposing and reproducing the colonial identities of civilised European and unfathomable native" (44). Miller's encomium on Duras' work is to foreground the writer's art in incorporating gender and colonisation into autobiographical writing.

Miller's theorisation of African women's autobiography unveils the problematic involved in the adoption of this genre by those who have, by reason of their gender, been confined to the reproductive functions of their bodies and denied access to mainstream literary corpus. In the same token, Miller agrees with Domna Stanton that women's literary productions have been denigrated because they are mainly autobiographical narrations of lived experiences of their authors, which concentrate on private issues. And so in order to break away from the long history whereby women's narratives are considered personal, reproductive, and maternal and therefore, non-literary, the task for them is to align themselves with male predecessors who have dissociated themselves from the maternal figure by writing outside the confines of reproduction.

It is in line with this theory that Miller examines critically the centrality of infanticide as a recurring theme and artistry in the autobiographical works of Mariama Ba, Aminata Sow Fall, and Marguerite Duras. Infanticide becomes the means by which these writers rewrite the conventions of autobiography and Francophone (male) writing

by Leopold Senghor, Camara Laye, and Sembene Ousmane where the woman is the "nurturer, giver of life, guardian of culture" (106). In Miller's analysis of Sow Fall's *L'Appel des arenas,* two characters are implicated in the crime of infanticide, Diattou and Anta, and both are systematically made to disappear from the narration because they have done the unspeakable. By introducing the unnaratable in this way, Miller interprets it as Sow Fall's attempt to change the equation of women to the reproductive function. Like Sow Fall, Ba also introduces infanticide into her writing to disprove the point that women's writing must necessarily be autobiographical with the author as referent. In her conclusion, Miller posits that these authors centre this violent and inhumane act in their works as a way of showing that as in colonialism and its representation of the colonised and also in literature, there is "the potential for brutality in all relationships of gross inequality" (127). More importantly, by writing against the kernel of the conventions of traditional autobiography, Miller submits that these writers inscribe the female voice in the formulation of the extension of former boundaries of the genre and also question the possibility of realising autobiography in a postmodern and postcolonial setting.

2.6 Summary of Observations on the Critical Works Reviewed

The study of autobiography first started as a historical and religious evidence, pointing to histories of nations and periods, and used to analyse the contributions of great men to their societies. Later, literary critics began to pay attention to it as a genre of literature. We subscribe to Alabi's position that one of the most appropriate methods of studying autobiography is to situate it within specific cultural, historical and ideological contexts of writers. Also useful is his transnational and transgendered criticism of black autobiography which connects works that are seemingly different and links contemporary black autobiography to two antecedents: African oral tradition and

the slave narrative. His submission that black autobiographies are fundamentally communal and counter-discursive to slavery, racism, colonialism and that differences occur only in the writer's gender, perception of Africa, and the use of literary devices, pioneers more recent approach in the study of black autobiography.

Since African women's autobiography involves both feminist and postcolonial perspectives, theorising the tradition requires a combination of these two approaches. This is what informed our review of theoretical works which combine both approaches such as Smith and Watson's *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (1998), McNee's *Selfish Gifts: Senegalese Women's Autobiographical Discourses* (2000), Miller's *(Re)productions: Autobiography, Colonialism, and Infanticide* (2003), and Rice's *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing from the Maghreb* (2006). Smith and Watson's argument that the study of autobiography from different contexts should take into account varied indices such as gender, language, locations, history, and culture is useful for theorising and mapping traditions of autobiography. These indices are included in the theoretical works of McNee, Miller, and Rice. However, these three deduce their theories from both fictional and non-fictional autobiographies and attempt to demarcate literary traditions of autobiography by collating texts that share thematic and stylistic features. Miller's theory of African women's autobiographical writing as tools for re-defining "womanhood" is more specific than McNee and Rice's postulations. Her theory is useful because it proceeds from the feminist criticism of reproduction as a marker of female otherness and shows how African women's autobiography employs both limiting and delimiting powers of reproduction. Like McNee and Rice, Miller's theory derives from only Francophone Africa neglecting other linguistic and geographical parameters and, therefore, it cannot be said to be

representative of African women's autobiography; neither can it map a literary tradition of same. Moreover, her analysis is based on a more Western feminist notion which is somehow opposed to reproduction than the African version which celebrates it.However, the highlights of her theory as they relate to the power of women "subjects" to reorder otherness are presented in the next chapter.

Self-representation in autobiography is based primarily on "difference" or otherness, whereby there is a focus on characteristic experiences of the narrator-protagonist that separate him/her from others. The strategies of representing these "differences" are usually indicative of underlying influences within the context of self-representation. Just as the poet, novel/prose writer or playwright adopts certain aesthetic/devices in projecting their concerns, an author of an autobiographical writing also employs narrative strategies in presenting the life story.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have established that autobiography criticism is not simply interested in the life story of the narrator but also the strategies employed by the narrator-protagonist. In addition, feminist criticism adopts specific methods in interpreting life story, which take cognisance of the gender of the writer and his/her disposition towards women issues while postcolonial criticism inquires into the influence of slavery, colonialism, and histories on the narrator and narration. Feminist and postcolonial criticisms both contextualise autobiography and propose literary traditions of autobiography within the conditions and realities that must have shaped them. This chapter proceeds from the theoretical proposition of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese that a literary tradition is not simply a mediated account of the experience of a particular group but a combination of the experiences and strategies of representation. It presents feminist and postcolonial perspectives of otherness, on which this study builds its argument in reading selected texts.

3.1 Research Methods

A selection of six texts from a wide range of fictional and non-fictional autobiographies authored by women in the past thirteen years is used for analysis. This study explores environmental and cultural differences in selected texts and connects them by adopting feminist and postcolonial approaches in reading them. Specifically, the influences of the various types of colonialism experienced in different parts of Africa, Western education, Islam and Christianity, ethnicity, political struggles of groups like the Mau Mau of East Africa, multiculturalism and migration, and others are on the

themes of these autobiographies are examined. The study discusses the ways in which these women interrogate otherness from the perspective of the different realities that they have experienced. It highlights the different temperaments the selected works exhibit towards issues like marriage, womanhood and motherhood, religion, the extended family system, and men.

3.2 Theorising Otherness in Feminist Criticism

The feminist conception of otherness as proposed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and expanded by Sheila Rowbotham and Nancy Chodorow, among other feminist theorists, describes the condition of the female or woman as the "other" or "second" sex in patriarchal setting. Being the "other" separates the woman from the privileges, rights and roles of the man who determines the fate of the woman in the society. De Beauvoir argues that in human relations, otherness is supposed to be a two-way phenomenon in which "self" can be seen as the "other" and the "other" in turn can become "self". In other words, otherness is expected to be reciprocal and according to Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, "through our encounters with other individuals, it becomes evident that just as we see them as 'the Other', we ourselves are seen by them as 'the Other'. However, in the case of women and men, this reciprocity of otherness is not recognised." (90)

What men do is to repudiate any comparative connection with women and project men as "the sole essential" (ibid). One of the fall-outs of the one-sided representation of otherness is that the man dominates the private and public spheres leaving the woman with no avenue for self-realisation as an equal sex with the man. This dominance is reflected in patriarchal discourse where "woman" is synonymous with "weaker" and "inferior" on a comparative scale with the man.

De Beauvoir's book was written at a time French women were seriously repressed, marginalized and denied "control over their own fertility and expression of their sexuality" and they also "were unable to assume financial autonomy and were discriminated against in the labour market" (Tidd 50). All that the woman is known for and allowed to be is a wife and mother. In Beauvoir's analysis, woman's otherness is a limiting and oppressive condition in which the woman is confined to the reproductive space in history and within the social structure and is to remain in obscurity as the inferior sex. The woman as the "other" is naturally "written out" of history and economic structures are designed in accordance with men's needs and visions, which invariably do not favour women participation. By developing the concept of "the second sex", Beauvoir pioneers the naming of women and their condition in critical discourse.

The naming of the woman's condition as the "other" underscores the difference between the man and woman and also creates an awareness that is critical of the representation or lack of representation of women in public and critical discourse. It should be noted that Beauvoir's feminist intervention in the field of philosophy centres on how the duo of marriage and motherhood have been used against women and how women have had to construct their own identity in terms of being wives and mothers. Apart from analysing this process of subordination, Beauvoir's theory empowers the woman as a "speaking subject" to rupture the social order that disempowers her and puts the female "self" at the centre of this counter-discourse by rewriting history in favour of women and reordering the social order. It is from this perspective that the first dimension of the theoretical framework for this study is derived. In the selected texts of Nawal El Saadawi, Wambui Waiyaki Otieno, Ramphele Mamphela, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Calixthe Beyala, Sindiwe Magona and Tendayi Westerhof, the female narrators are "speaking subjects" who define "self" from the position of the "other".

Otherness in their autobiographical writing becomes empowering to the "speaking narrator" and an avenue for accessing autonomous existence as individuals and not subordinate or inferior sex to men.

Autonomy in feminist discourse is considered a highly charged and problematic term due to the way it has been applied to men, and made to "mean" for men more than women. In patriarchy, as supported by Hegel and Rousseau among other male thinkers, being autonomous or independent is central to "manliness" where the man is free to take decisions for himself, maintain full rights of citizenship including occupying the public space, while women are to remain "at home, providing a basis of moral feeling derived from the 'natural' or 'nether' worlds" (Griffiths 140). Feminist theorists have reasoned that women's otherness is perpetrated in patriarchal setting by the discouragement and opposition women get about going "public" and refuting dependence. The woman's identity as determined by patriarchy is supposed to be defined by her dependency and not the lack of it. Morwenna Griffiths defines autonomy as "the freedom to be yourself, to speak for yourself, to determine your own life, in the knowledge that a worthwhile life includes cultural and social bonds, and in the knowledge that such bonds will last during periods of relative need for the help of others and relative responsibility to meet the needs of others" (139). Women lack autonomy as long as they do not have the freedom to speak for themselves, determine their own lives, and manage their social relationships the way they want. By extension, on the one hand, Gusdorf's theory of the isolated individual male autobiography agrees with this concept of autonomy because he is expected to see "self" as being separate and by implication free from the "other". On the other hand, feminist theory of autobiography questions the isolated "self" for fragmented "selves" because it recognises the disadvantage to women, of the concept of isolation since women's lives "mean" in relation to "others", grandmothers, mothers,

fathers and others. The starting point for women's autobiography is interdependence, as we shall explore later in this chapter.

Postmodernist and poststructuralist feminist theorists and writers have however advanced the theory of otherness. Hill Collins, Anthias and Yuval-Davies, Helen Cixous, Iriguay, and Julia Kristeva among others have argued that de Beauvoir's theory and others akin to it, in the words of Pilcher and Whelehan, only promote "the binarism in Western philosophical thought, a tendency so deeply implicated in the valuing of masculinity over femininity" (92). These later theorists have maintained that otherness is not a simple term as its course can be variously determined by multiple power structures at play for instance, in a multicultural and postcolonial setting. They contend with the static concept of otherness advanced by de Beauvoir to favour a more dynamic concept of otherness, which recognises the changeableness or variety of positions that women can occupy at different times or the same time.

Cixous's thought on masculinity and femininity is a good example of the variegated otherness that later feminists than de Beauvoir advance. In her work titled *Sorties*, Cixous questions the simple and rigid binary oppositions that have characterised man/woman discourse in "literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation, of reflection" (Toi 287). She opines that each sex has something of the other in him/her and therefore, one cannot freely or rigidly speak of man or woman without crossing some borders. The best and most rewarding interaction that she favours between sexes is one in which both admit "the component of the other sex" (292). For her, otherness is fluid and can bring about positive development or better still, "*invention*" when self possesses "an abundance of the other, of the diverse" (292). She seems to propose that no sex is an island and that real change or liberation will be when:

> 'femininity', 'masculinity,' would inscribe their effects of difference, their economy, their relationship to expenditure, to deficit, to giving differently. That which appears as 'feminine' or 'masculine' today would no longer amount to the same thing. The general logic of difference would no longer fit into the opposition that still dominates. The difference will be a crowning display of differences. (292)

She envisions a future where difference will not be a monolithic designation of opposition but multiple representations of the interactive and overlapping realities about sexuality.

3.3 Otherness in Postcolonial Criticism

Apart from feminist theories of otherness, postcolonial discourse deploys the term to explain colonial power relations in writing, social and political spheres. Postcolonial theorists' exposition on the politics of representation in the discourse of the coloniser highlights the superior, strong, masculine and rational image that the coloniser gives "self" as against the stereotypic portraiture of the "other", the colonised who is inferior, weak, feminine, natural, and barbaric. Elleke Boehmer's description is apt:

> The concept of the other, which is built on the thought of, *inter alia*, Hegel, Sartre, and Said, signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined. The West thus conceived of its superiority relative to the perceived lack of power, self-consciousness, or ability to think and rule, of colonized peoples. (21)

The dominant subjectivity casts people of other colour, outside the West, in derogatory terms and puts the other on levels that are in all ramifications lower than self. Therefore, in colonial discourse, there exists a power relation in which otherness marks the coloniser as the master and the colonised as the servant. Within the process of differentiating the coloniser from the colonised, the coloniser determines what is "ideal" and "normal" as against what is "different" and "abnormal" which is what the other is. In postcolonial theory, otherness is recognised as a tool of subjugation, which identifies the postcolonial world with "the feminine", weakness, and subordination and the

imperial power with masculinity, strength, and domination. It is interesting to note that postcolonial criticism resists the "feminine" label for the postcolonial world because it recognises in it the long-standing prejudice that has produced the "feminine" in patriarchal, pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial settings. Invariably, while opposing the coloniser's discourse, postcolonial theory also resists itself as a product of patriarchy by rejecting the "feminine".

Notably, the manifestations of the colonial concept of otherness find expression in the literature of the colonisers. Postcolonial criticism has identified the jaundiced and dehumanising portraiture of the colonised in travelogues, autobiographical writing including diaries and memoirs, and novels as a deliberate attempt on the coloniser's part to justify, rationalise, and perpetuate exploitative imbalance relations with the colonised world. In the discourse of the coloniser, "[t]he other could signify anything from irresistible delight to social unacceptability and instability, moral pollution, nightmare, and syphilis" (Boehmer 26). Said's work, *Orientalism* (1978), despite some of the negative attention it has received, continues to provide a firm foundation for the understanding of the textual and intellectual attitude of the West to the rest of the world and will be used here to discuss further the concept of otherness in postcolonial theory.

Orientalism refers to the "discourse of the West about the East, a huge body of texts... that have been accumulating since the Renaissance" (Porter 294). Edward Said considers this discourse as the singular most potent tool employed by the West to dominate the Orient. As the knowledgeable and possessor of discursive power, the West churns out volumes of texts, fictional and non-fictional, in which the Orient is made known. This discourse posits "the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (42) and it seems, according to Said's argument, that it feeds on

and fits into a certain concept of what the other ought to be and not what it is. He states that:

> For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")... A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner's privilege; because he was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery, as Disraeli once called it. (44)

Said's work clearly maps out the systematic and consistent manner in which the West underscores difference or otherness as the ultimate quality that separates the dominated from the dominator. The West demonstrates mastery over the Orient by producing and maintaining narratives of the native other and keeping the difference intact.

Two features of postcolonial reading of otherness that are relevant to this study are that the West as explored extensively by Said, projects self, that is, the Western self as the universal subject which speaks for the other who in spite of visible geographic, historical, religious and cultural differences are lumped together. Western novel, for instance, is the novel while others are "just novels" (Barry 192). The collective or communal is used against the other in imperialist or Western discourse and postcolonial criticism interrogates this claim to universalism by pointing out differences along the lines that Western discourse denies or ignores. In other words, to use Peter Barry's words, the other, the East, as an example,

> tends to be seen as homogeneous, the people there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury, etc) rather than by conscious choices or decisions. Their emotions and reactions are always determined by racial considerations (they are like this because they are asiatics or blacks or orientals) rather than by aspects of individual status or circumstance (for instance, because they happen to be a sister, or an uncle, or a collector of antique pottery). (193)

Barry's summary of Said's argument sheds more light on the issue of individuality versus collectivity in Western discourse of the postcolonial world. Dominance of the

colonised in socio-political, cultural and literary spheres are perpetrated by a deliberate attempt to silence individual, national, and cultural differences among the colonised. This is so because the acknowledgement of such differences will fragment the whole and cohesive structures of depicting the other who is bereft of variables that may spring surprises at the "knowledgeable West". The continued representation of the other as "anonymous masses" is central to the project of Western dominance.

Therefore, in terms of representing self as an individual, the postcolonial subject transgresses limiting and predetermined discursive boundaries that set self within certain parameters. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said captures the power-play involved in representation:

> The capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society; moreover, the "what" and "how" in the representation of "things," while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated. We have become very aware in recent years of the constraints upon the cultural representation of women, and the pressures that go into the created representations of inferior classes and races... thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior. (80)

There is not going to be any change in the representation of the other, if the other does not enter into the same economy of representation to shift boundaries and unsettled fixed imagery. In this regard, autobiography provides an appropriate medium for the other to underline differences and rewrite collectivity not as an inferior feature of otherness but as an alternative approach to representation.

A combination of gender and colonial experience invariably shifts the boundaries of traditional Western criticism of the autobiographical, demanding in Smith and Watson's words, "different texts from different locales require" the development of "different theories and practices of reading" (xxviii). It is to this structure that practitioners and critics of African women's autobiography, for whom the resistance

framework of postcolonial literary landscape is a defining mode, conform, and at the same time, the structure is contrasted with the theoretical postulations of Western (male and female) criticism of autobiography. They organise their life stories, choosing events, people and places to project their intention or concern, underlining the "difference" between the narrator and "other" people of a different culture, class, gender, race, and even ideology.

In Boehmer's description of colonialist concept of otherness, she mentions among others, a quality lacking in the barbaric colonised: self-consciousness. It is not a coincidence that Western (male) theorists have underlined self-consciousness or isolation as a condition for autobiography because the colonialist discourse permeates all forms of literary expression and criticism. The self-conscious is the superior, the transcendent male whose life story is worth writing/reading. That is to say, autobiography, if considered within the postcolonial discourse, is a colonized genre. Western feminist theory on the other hand, taking a cue from Virginia Woolf's theoretical position, privileges the unconscious as the superior mode through which "real" or "truthful" life writing can be done. In any case, choosing between self-consciousness and unconsciousness leaves the African women's autobiography within the grips of dominant colonialist theory. One of the questions that may arise if it chooses either of these modes is that if she writes as a self-conscious or isolated subject where are the "others", considering the structure of the African family system and the "others" around whom, according to feminist criticism, the woman constructs her identity? Or if she opts for the unconscious in order to be truthful, where do we place the palpable realities of her experiences in the context of the histories, social and political conditions of Africa; how can she communicate with her audience and make meaning if her work takes on heightened modernist temperament such as Woolf's?

3.4 African Oral Tradition as Theoretical and Practical Antecedents

The oral antecedents of African literature have long been established as a strong marker of "difference" or otherness. Critics sought for connections between the oral and the written forms of literary expressions that are obtainable in Africa, including the diasporic Africa. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of the signifying monkey speaks for this connection and becomes one of the beginnings of this type of theoretical enterprise in literary criticism. Gates, Jr. was motivated by the need to interrogate the imperialistic and jaundiced notion that "theory is the province of the Western tradition, something alien or removed from the so-called non-canonical tradition such as that of the Afro-American" (xx). That is to say, the birth of that theory signifies the proper demarcation of the African American literary tradition. The theory as contained in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Criticism* (1985), proposes that "black texts" are different from "white texts" because they possess double voice in that their literary antecedents are both white and black novels, and have also adopted modes of figuration lifted from the black vernacular. Gates, Jr. explains his project:

> The Signifying monkey explores the relation of the black vernacular tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition. The book is an attempt to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition. My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions, appropriated from without. (xxi)

His mission is two-fold: to make the black text speak for itself and to rescue it from being misread as an offshoot of white texts. In this sense, the otherness of black texts is properly underscored by the fact of their ability to generate distinct theory that is derived from their African origin.

Adetayo Alabi has established that there are strong connections between black autobiography and African oral traditions. The convergences he identifies include the adoption of African communal lifestyle, narrative strategies of "folktales, epics, witches' and wizards' confessions, religious testimonies, and praise poems" (7). The resistant tradition of modern African literary productions is not unrelated with its counterpart in oral tradition. In his analysis,

> The communal basis of Black oral autobiographies and their functions as history and resistance are carried over to the written versions of the genre. Both versions are used to record the communal struggles for survival by Black people. They are historical accounts of Black resistance to slavery, apartheid, colonialism, neo-colonialism, sexism, and other oppressive forms. (12)

The success of Alabi's work derives basically from the identification of the roots of black autobiography in order to locate the tradition in the wider context of postcolonial criticism. Like Gates, Jr., he "dewesternises" the genre and reads selected texts as products of an African consciousness.

3.4.1 The *Oloto* Concept of Otherness

Women's oral genres have been linked with African women's writing specifically by critics and theorists who are interested in establishing the continuity between the oral and written in contemporary African literary criticism and theory. Mary Kolawole's theory of African womanism is founded on the visibility, relevance, irrepressibility, and vocality of African women as evident in the plethora of oral genres of women in African societies. She underlines the function of these genres as avenues of self-expression for women who conveniently resist different forms of oppression and make public, individual and group aspirations, achievements, and views on womanhood.

She agrees with Micere Mugo that African women in traditional settings, especially in the past, not only "spoke the word" but also applied it to creative ventures

as seen in their genres. Kolawole draws attention to the influence of the form and content of women's oral genres on their written counterpart as a way of bringing out the African consciousness that defines African womanism:

> The role of literature and orature in fostering African women's relocation is vital to the womanist philosophy… If through proverbs and other areas of folklore, the African woman has been demonised, female oral artists are still attempting self-retrieval and repositioning of their gender's social status and self-image. Through oral creative master-pieces, women writers as their gender's mouthpieces are underscoring women as the source of virtue. (78)

In the same light, contemporary African women's autobiography speaks for itself and its voice can be heard in the theory of *Oloto*:

Oloto ni t'ohun oto,	*Oloto* says his/hers is different,
Oto ni ti Tolu,	Different is that of *Tolu*
Oto ni ti To'luwo	Different is that of *Toluwo*
Oto ni ti Tolutolu	Different is that of *Tolutolu*

Generally, this proverbial among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is evoked when there is a need to underline difference or otherness. The story that culminated in this saying is about a man named *Oloto,* who lived at a time when those who died in hamlets and villages were interred in towns. *Oloto*'s mother died in the town and he decided, against the usual practice, to bury her in the village. The elders of the community challenged him to find out why he had taken such a decision, he replied, saying that "mine is different, just as others are different". *Tolu*, *To'luwo,* and *Tolutolu* are "others". Although *Oloto* is male, the proverbial is usually applied to either male or female depending on who is "different" in specific situations. For the purpose of this study which is centred on women's autobiography, *Oloto* will be read as a female.

In the first line, *Oloto* is a nominal, the name of a person that speaks about her difference and possesses or owns the discourse of difference by calling it "hers". In Yoruba traditional kingship naming, it is common to find traditional rulers being named

according to the frontiers of their dominion. We have for instance the "*Olowa* of Owa", "*Onikosi* of Ikosi", and "*Onikoyi* of Ikoyi" where Owa, Ikosi, and Ikoyi are kingdoms of *Olowa*, *Onikosi*, and *Onikoyi* respectively. The identities of each of these rulers are inseparable from specific places over which they exercise their power. Their names mark territorial boundaries and underline their difference from one another and their sameness in bearing the names of their kingdoms.

A close examination of the proverbial cited above reveals some dialectics first in naming and then in the process of "othering" or constructing difference. As feminist and African critics of autobiography have rightly noted that "self" makes meaning when considered in relation with "others" and not in isolation from them, *Oloto*'s difference is enabled by the inclusion and not exclusion of "others" and in fact, her otherness is highlighted by the mention of "*Tolu*", "*Toluwo*", and *Tolutolu*. Both *tolu* and *toluwo* are also different, but together, as a group that has been brought together by "difference", they create a paradigm marked by difference.

In the second place, *Oloto* occupies a primal position among them for the reason that she speaks about her difference while it is implied that "others" are spoken about and spoken for. "Speakability" becomes an empowering ability in this sense. Since *Oloto* is in control of the construction of her otherness, she decides the parameters by which this otherness is presented in "self" and "others". *Oloto*'s dominion is on *oto* or difference, which she can be proud of as something that defines her individuality not isolation as a Western subject/self would have underscored, within the group or community. Barber's anthropological study of *oriki* in Okuku, Southwestern Nigeria highlights the importance of difference as a characteristic feature, which makes the genre realisable. Both for the performer and the subject of praise, though communal identity is involved, individuality cannot be glossed over. She explores the difference

"insider knowledge" makes between two performers; Sangowemimo and Faderera, who are both women and on the surface prolific in the *oriki* art. However, according to Barber, Faderera possesses a higher skill and more knowledge than the other in chanting the *oriki* of Faderera's family because she, though not a professional artist, is a member of that family (*obirin ile*). Barber submits:

> This difference was reflected in the quality and texture of their chants… The difference was always explained in terms of their depth: obirin ile knew, perhaps, only a few lineages oriki orile and a few people's personal oriki. But those that they knew were acknowledged by their owners to be ijinle oro, deep words. They were fuller than Sangowemimo's renderings of the same oriki, and contained idiosyncracies and details that hers did not. They contained less showmanship but more substance. (101)

As argued by Alabi, *oriki* or praise poetry is an African auto/biographical genre, which tells life stories; we can understand Barber's submission in terms of the reliability, factualness, and expressiveness of both performers. Faderera, confirms her difference to Barber in her own autobiographical chant, "*Tani o mole ju mi o/ Omo Awoyemi, ta ni i mole eni juni lo*?", "Child of Awoyemi, who knows anyone's house more than the person herself" (102). In this context, Faderera asserts her superiority as an insider/self to Sangowemimo an outsider/other, and emphasises difference or otherness in terms of the depth of her knowledge about the family or house. In this sense, Faderera engages the Oloto discourse, exercising her power as the speaker of the family text/life.

African women writers-critics also use Faderera's paradigm and adapt it to underscore otherness in contemporary African literature. For instance, in Adeola James's *In Their Own Voices*, an autobiographical work where she interviews women writers across Africa, Buchi Emecheta, a notable female writer from Nigeria speaks about her life as a writer. The autobiographical interview features her family background, marital experience, and issues about "the woman question" among others. Emecheta constructs her identity as a female writer around series of experiences and

finally she talks about the reception of her work by male writers by comparing her work with that of Flora Nwapa, another notable female author from Nigeria:

> Adeola: How do male writers regard you?
>
> Buchi: They pretend you are not a threat, but they feel threatened. They don't say it, but you know. They feel comfortable with other female writers who they know are never a threat, like Flora (Nwapa), who won't come out and say what she feels. I don't blame her because she lives in Nigeria, and she is a good woman. She is creating her own life, her own career, in a polygamous environment, and she keeps cool…
>
> Adeola: She has talent and she is a pioneer.
>
> Buchi: Certainly, she has it in her. But it is when they see women who they know they can't underrate, they have nothing good to say. (38)

Both Emecheta and Nwapa are women, writers, Nigerians, and Igbo, but it seems that is where their similarities end.

Emecheta's portrayal of "self" as an "other" of men and a fellow woman underscores "the air of superiority" in which she assesses a co-female author whose writing is by no means less "female-centred" than hers. Underlining Emecheta's comment is the attempt she makes to separate "self" from "others" and also determine the criteria for marking difference. Emecheta is the "speaking subject" who names self and the "other". She is the *Oloto* of this criticism who constructs a group for "others" in relation to self, and exercises her power as the speaking subject to categorise a woman writer, Nwapa as the "other" who is grouped with "they" in the final lines.

Emecheta compares and contrasts "self" with the "other" in an attempt to inscribe her "difference" or otherness. One of the points of divergence from Nwapa is the physical location while another is ideology. She claims that Nwapa is one of the "other female writers who they know are never a threat" whereas, she (Emecheta) is one of those "they know they can't underrate". In fact throughout the interview, Emecheta

alludes to her vocality as a mark of her difference. In narrating her life story, she refers to occasions when she was discriminated against as a woman and castigated, even threatened for her vocality. The reason why she considers Nwapa as the "other" is because she thinks the latter is not as "vocal" as she is in her writing. In this sense, vocality gives access to the female "speaking subject" or "self" in an autobiographical narration, to name, group and assess the "other". In addition, vocality is an attribute chosen by Emecheta in her autobiographical interview to assert her difference.

Still within this dimension of otherness is the conscious attempt by female authors and critics to "look back" into the lives and ideologies of preceding female generations in order to conceptualise their definition of womanhood. Grandmothers, mothers, female legends and mythical figures are in this context the "others" whose lived experiences and words form the bedrock of the female-author's *oeuvre* and the female-theorist's resource. Kolawole in her contribution to feminist debate in African literature argues for an "African consciousness" in discussing the woman question. A reasonable portion of her book examines the formidability of African foremothers who according to her, made history through their irrepressibility and strength. For example, she draws from historical figures such as Moremi of Ile-Ife in Southwestern Nigeria, Queen Aminat of Zaria in the North, and the Omu of Eastern Nigeria, to substantiate her proposition for a complementary role sharing among men and women. By looking at the histories of women's activities and positions in traditional, precolonial and colonial Africa, she demonstrates that female authors from Africa are not venturing into a "foreign" or "imported" idea by writing against female subordination and promoting the image of the voiced and invincible woman.

African women autobiographers do not only create space for themselves in history but also identify with the success of older generation of women. They position

"self" in unity with "(m)others", grandmothers, and women of worth, as a strategy to resist domination, subvert liminal roles and generally project and promote "self", so that their position as "other" becomes empowering. In women's autobiography, mothers' and grandmothers' stories and narrator's interaction with them are never in the minority and neither are they inconsequential; rather, they are a foundation for building the life narrative. The mother is her first teacher and probably role model as the female autobiographical writer attempts to fulfil this role by narrating life experience for the purpose of instructing and guiding generations to come.

In which case, the autobiography may characteristically explore experiences that are personal and at the same time common to women of probably her age, ethnic group, religious persuasions, social conditions, and marital circumstances. It should be noted that in accordance with the Yoruba adage that "*eni to jin si koto o ko ara iyoku logbon*" (the person that falls into a ditch teaches others some sense) not all mothers or female figures are considered by some of the authors selected for the study as worthy of patterning "self" after. This is because in the position of the "speaking subject", the autobiographer does an assessment of the achievements and shortcomings of older generations and consciously refrains from identifying with their shortcomings. In this case, they speak, positioning such women as the "other".

As much as otherness is a group, ethnic, national, gender concept, it is also personal. The individual is not always bound to go along the line of her gender, ethnicity, or race but is at liberty, most often, to determine the "other". Inter-gender, intra-gender or inter-personal, and inter-racial/inter-ethnic dimensions of otherness are all possibilities. The vital point of otherness in *Oloto* discourse, and as shown in women's literary works, is the subjectivity of the speaker/ narrator-protagonist and her power to construct narratives that reflect her otherness.

3.5 Otherness in Women's Autobiography

Most feminist interpretation of otherness particularly in female-authored autobiographical texts is usually hinged on the argument that rather than possessing a single "I", there are multiple subjects narrating their lives. Therefore, there are stories within an autobiographical writing that are as important as that of the main narrator and produce some contours that are capable of shifting the attention of the reader from the author to the "others" whose stories may also be narrated in the first person singular pronoun. While the validity of this interpretive mode is not in doubt, it is not always the case that otherness presents itself in this same way in women's autobiography. There may be a single narrator throughout the text but many "silent" others whose stories shape the plot and aesthetics of narration and are subjects of their own stories. Their inclusion in the autobiography is not accidental or egoistical but points to important constituents of the narrator's life that might fill major gaps by helping to identify the thematic preoccupation of the narrator, narrator's character, strengths and weaknesses, and common experiences of the period covered by the narration.

In nineteenth-century slave narratives for example, the significance of otherness in women's autobiography can be better understood by examining the autobiography of Mary Prince, titled *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself to Which is Added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa, an African.* As the subject of her narration, Prince projects otherness from two perspectives. She organises her experiences as a slave from the subject position of an "other" of slaveholders whose inhuman treatment of slaves is validated by discourses such as "beast", "nigger", and "property".

In these discourses, she and other slaves are mute and not represented because they do not possess human qualities that will make them possible subjects of the

narratives of slaveholders. As the "subject" of her narrative, she speaks for herself and other slaves who have experienced similar inhuman treatment but are not able to narrate their lives in the autobiography. In fact, a good proportion of the autobiography is devoted to stories of other slaves whose horrifying experiences at the hands of white slave masters are included as her own experience. She narrates their experience in one of the slave islands, Grand Quay:

> I was immediately sent to work in the salt water with the rest of the slaves. This work was perfectly new to me. I was given a halfbarrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, from four o'clock in the morning till nine, when we were given some Indian corn boiled in water, which we were obliged to swallow as fast as we could for fear the rain should come on and melt the salt. We were then called again to our tasks, and worked through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment. We came home at twelve; ate our corn soup, called *blawly*, as fast as we could, and went back to our employment till dark at night. We then shovelled up the salt in large heaps, and went down to the sea, where we washed the pickle from our limbs, and cleaned the barrows and shovels from the salt. When we returned to the house, our master gave us each our allowance of raw Indian corn, which we pounded in a mortar and boiled in water for our suppers. (38)

In a narration that sets out to tell the story of an individual, the insertion of the pronoun "we" drowns the individual subject and centres the multiple and plural subjects whose experiences are as important as that of Mary Prince the narrator. These "others" cannot be excluded from her life narrative because they all belong to one community of slaves whose collective experience is the focus of the narrative. Through the adoption of the pronoun "we", Prince portrays the evils of slavery from the subject position of a slave and substantiates their call for the abolition of slavery at that period in history. She says, "in telling my own sorrows I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves-for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs" (40).

Telling her story pulls a string of series of subjects whose stories are not diversions but directions to the larger framework of her slave narrative. Furthermore, since they all belong to the same frame of experience but the others are not privileged to tell their stories in the medium of autobiographical writing, Prince subsumes her personal experience in theirs with a commitment to articulate their sufferings as well as hers. She is not a "special" or isolated "narrator" preoccupied with her life but a spokesperson or speaking subject who authenticates her position in the following statement, which she makes towards the close of her autobiography: "I have been a slave myself—I know what slaves feel—I can tell by myself what other slaves feel, and by what they have told me" (54).

If compared with the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, a marked difference can be observed. Douglass's narration is similar to other men's slave narrative in which the autobiography is "a story of the lone male achieving literacy, freedom and manhood…" (177). Unlike Mary's, his story centres on himself and how he acquired the skills and knowledge that propelled him to seek means of attaining freedom from the shackles of slavery. In addition, most often in the narration, other slaves' experiences are highlighted as they affect the psyche of Douglass and underline the progressive development of his character and manhood. In the first chapter of his autobiography, he describes a bloody and horrifying experience of a female slave who receives more than a fair share of "whipping" in her lifetime because of her outstanding beauty and the admiration she draws from male slaves and white masters. He recalls his first contact with this woman's ordeal:

> I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember anything. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a

> most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it…I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over. I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen anything like it before. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was put to raise the children of the younger women. I had therefore been, until now, out of the way of the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation. (120-1)

The preponderance of the singular subject "I" shows a narrative that follows in the steps of earlier male autobiography, which is about the individual with a unique experience worth narrating. Even if his separation from the woman's experience can be excused on the basis of gender difference, he does not seem to alter this singularity when he tells stories that involve him and other male slaves. A striking example is his narration of the monthly walk to the Great House where a few male slaves, who are considered privileged by their mates, are selected to go on behalf of others to collect their ration of food and related items to last a month. He is fortunate to be included in this procession of slaves from Colonel Lloyd's plantation and witnesses the singing sessions done by these men on their way to the place:

> While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and deepest sadness… I was myself within the circle. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness… The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience …. (124-5)

This a highly emotional experience gone through by Douglass and others but he is not slow to isolate the "I" from "they" and he even expresses their feelings in the third person singular pronoun in order to bring out his individuality. Lastly, the long passage is rounded off with the statement that can be understood as an attempt to quickly go back to the center of the narration, "at least such is my experience". He speaks for himself as a subject of that experience.

Another female autobiographer, Virginia Woolf, in one of her memoirs, “A Sketch of the Past”, talks about the mother as one of those indispensable presences in a woman’s life writing:

> She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life. This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that; or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analyzed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially. (80)

She recognises that “other” groups are omitted from the “Lives” or autobiographies she has read. These “Lives” are most likely those of “great men” like Augustine, Rousseau and others in this category whose works were highly rated in Woolf’s days. The inclusion of hidden presences usually diverts attention from the central subject of the narration to show how they have influenced the construction of selfhood. If compared with traditional male autobiography, Woolf’s autobiography contains many subjects whose actions or inactions bear on the image of “self” she constructs and will in traditional male-centered criticism disqualify her work as autobiography because it contains not a single subject but multiple subjects. Therefore, her gender alters the terms of autobiography by projecting otherness as an ingredient for selfhood.

Another remarkable example of otherness in women’s autobiographical writing can be found in Getrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklass.* This is also true about her other autobiography, *Everybody’s Autobiography* where right from the outset, Stein expresses her postmodernist temperament by questioning the possibility of writing about “self” in the past. She posits that a singular and unified selfhood or identity is impossible because

> …you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right. You are of course never yourself. (68)

By questioning the authenticity of memory, she also questions unitary "self" that is constructed through that memory. In fact, she experiments with subjectivities throughout *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by collapsing her voice as the author with that of Toklas and creating a sort of confusion in the heart of the reader. The autobiography is supposed to have been the life of the fictive character, Toklas, but most often, the narration is about the life of Getrude Stein and Toklas is pushed to the background as the "other" subject of narration. As succinctly put by Gygax:

> Stein's self is never one, but always an "I" plus an "I"; "II" can be read as the Roman numeral two, or 1 plus 1 equals two, and so on. Writing one's own self is not possible for Stein because her self is always in dialogue with another "I," and sometimes the other "I" is Toklas, but it can also be the reader or everybody. (66)

The dialogue between the self and other disguises the voice of narration and displaces the "I" of conventional autobiography. It then implies that if the "other" so easily merges as self and vice versa, otherness is no longer outside self rather within it and a voice for expressing selfhood.

While in autobiography criticism on the one hand, the male autobiographer is by virtue of his otherness, the ideal that embodies conventions and typologies through which others are constructed, on the other hand, women autobiographers come into the arena, armed with the authority of the author to construct identities, projecting alternative category of reading autobiography and contesting the essentials of the "self" and "other".

3.6 Otherness in Contemporary African Autobiographical Writing

Changes in human experiences are not only reflected in literary productions but also engender theoretical frameworks that will be suitable for reading them. At the beginning of postcolonial criticism, the centre of postcolonial discourse was the linear and homogeneous concept of binary opposition in which the colonizer is pitched against the colonised and vice versa. But as feminist and Marxist theorists deepen and expand the concept of otherness to reflect difference in gender and class, the terms of reference also changed. Women and the poor or oppressed became the "other" of men, the powerful and the oppressor and at the same time became "self" in narratives that make them subjects and determinants of who the "other" is and how otherness should be constructed. This shift underlines the importance of socio-political and personal experience in literary productions and theoretical framework. Contemporary postcolonial African writing is better understood in this context. For the contemporary writer, linear and homogeneous construction of otherness is problematic in the face of multiculturalism and migration. This pair has influenced writers and changed the course of postcolonial theory. Migrant African writers continue to present and represent contemporary images of "self" and "other" in their works. Out of all literary genres, autobiographical writing seems to be the most influenced by migration and multiculturalism as it allows the narrator(s) to express "self" and narrate "other" in the light of this experience.

In this analysis, experience is not just a series of events that the writing subject has been through; it is a major point that should be factored into the interpretation of her/his work. For example, Abdulrazak Gurnah, an African writer and critic, explains that his fascination with history in his works arises from his sense of being "loose adrift" as a migrant writer based in the United Kingdom. The landscape, narrative design,

characterization, and themes that he explores in the eight novels he has written over the past twenty-four years are influenced by his experience as a postcolonial writer. He draws from the memory he has about his childhood in Zanzibar and his experience in Britain as the material for expressing this condition and constructing his characters in the light of his own experience. Gurnah's works are examined in this section because they exemplify contemporary representation of otherness in African literature.

Gurnah's novels are all grounded in his experience of a multicultural African setting and the issue of migration as a major story of contemporary Africa. This experience renders his works pungent autobiographical writing because he uses his lived experience as the canvas for writing. In the interview he granted Susheila Natsa, he links his first novel, *Memory of Departure* to a specific experience:

> It was definitely the experience of England that did it, which is not to say I wasn't writing before, but it wasn't *writing*. In other words, I wasn't thinking of it as writing. It was just a thing I did. I didn't immediately think I would write. It was just the reality of being in England and finding that I had begun to write. I think of *Memory of Departure* very much as the novel where I learnt the important difference between writing things down and *writing*, the process of constructing ideas in fiction. (254)

His background as an East African writer has tremendous impact on his concept of heterogeneous Africa societies as evident in *Paradise* and *Desertion.* A reviewer, Laila Lalami, aptly describes Gurnah's origin:

> Zanzibar was, at various times in its history, under the rule of Persians from Shiraz, Arabs from Oman and Europeans from Portugal and Britain. The islands' location in the Indian Ocean, along major trade routes between Africa and Asia, made them a particularly enviable prize for conquerors. With few exceptions, the settlers tended to mix with the locals until the next wave of colonizers displaced them, resulting in a merging of languages and customs that makes the country one of those places for which the term "confluence of cultures" seems to have been invented. (1)

It is not surprising to find out that his novels are populated by black and colored Africans, of Asian and Arab descents in addition to a mixture of Europeans, Arabs,

Muslims and Christians whose lives are complicated by issues of race, religion, gender, and colonialism. Gurnah's *Desertion* is critically examined in the following paragraph as an example of the writer's contribution to the reconceptualization of otherness in contemporary African autobiographical writing. The novel is about Rashid, a young man from Zanzibar, who leaves his homeland for Britain in the mid-nineteen sixties in pursuit of his life-long dream of becoming an academic. Shortly after his departure, the politics of Zanzibar becomes chaotic, economy deteriorates and life becomes difficult for his family back home. At first, he is in regular contact with his family, but this is terminated as a result of the official censorship of correspondence to overseas country.

Series of mishap disintegrate his once ideal family and even his brother; Amin, the chief correspondent becomes blind. While the family faced these throes in Africa, Rashid makes good progress in his studies and within two decades of residence in Britain, he gets to the peak of his career. During an academic conference, he meets a young lady, Elizabeth, who presents a paper that triggers chains of memories and familial histories. They become lovers and dig into the past to explain the events of the present. These memories are at the core of the autobiographical narration and also account for the fragmented structure of the novel.

The novel opens with the stories of five people set in the close of the nineteenth century. The first is Hassanali, the son of an Indian man who is ostracized by his people because of his choice of an African woman as wife. Hassanali is married and lives with his sister, Rehana, who is a sought-after spinster. Even though in his capacity as the only male child of the family, he manages the family business and seems to be in charge, he is timid and is often intimidated by Rehana's intelligence and forthrightness. One morning, while Hassanali performs one of his pious duties of opening the mosque for

the usual dawn prayer, he finds a half-dead white man, Martin Pearce, at the door of the mosque.

Martin is a British historian on animal hunting expedition with some British hunters but has to discontinue his journey because of the disgust he feels towards the wanton killing of animals by these men. He is entrusted into the hands of two Somali guides who contemplate killing him but is lucky to have been abandoned only after they have robbed him of every possession he has except a small diary. As a true Muslim, Hassanali takes him in and cares for him with the cooperation of his sister, wife and other locals until the colonial official, Frederick Turner comes and rudely takes Martin away. Turner alleges that Hassanali and other natives have robbed him and are capable of inflicting further injuries on the weak historian.

Rehana's story is that of an intelligent and beautiful young woman abandoned by her first love and husband for whom she waits in hope. She is a victim of an unsympathetic patriarchal society who is stigmatized for being "single" at twenty-nine years old. It is in this state that Martin comes into her life as a lover in the midst of serious disapproval. She relocates to the city where she cohabits with Martin who deserts her after a few years of blissful life together. Their relationship produces a daughter, who is adopted by Hassanali and his wife to save the child and her mother from further ridicule. Rehana soon finds another lover and becomes notorious for her flings with white men. Amin, Rashid's brother now in the nineteen fifties falls in love with Jamila, who turns out to be Rehana's granddaughter. He writes a memoir detailing his experience as a secret lover of a colored lady in a society that sees biracialism as a kind of curse. It happens that Rashid's lover in Britain, Elizabeth, is Martin's granddaughter. Their meeting opens up a history and course that Elizabeth has sought for so long.

Gurnah's novel contains more than one level of otherness. In order of postcolonial criticism is the colonial "self" and the native "other". Turner, the government official has no qualms about assuming that the natives are depraved, uncouth chumps and capable of bringing bodily and psychological harm to Pearce. In a typical colonial discourse, Turner justifies colonialism, saying that the British have saved Africa from slavery and helped to establish civilized governance which Africans are incapable of doing. He comments on what he considers slothfulness among the natives "What passes for work in this town is men sitting under a tree waiting for the mangoes to ripen". He considers Pearce's interest in Rehana an abomination and does all within his power to discourage the relationship. However, apart from Turner, there are other Europeans but they defy stereotypic characterisation because some of them respect the natives and also befriend them. It is in this category that Pearce falls, he speaks Arabic and has a good grasp of the Arabic cum Islamic culture. He is labelled the "orientalist". The natives are also very suspicious of the British and consider them strange, hostile and godless. The *mzungus* as the natives call them are in the danger of being ridiculed if they ever venture into the area of the locals.

Indeed, the feeling of suspicion is mutual and each group constructs the image of the "other" in its own terms. Among the natives are the likes of Hassanali, Rehana, and Jamila who are biracial African characters. In reality, they are not considered authentic Africans simply because of their Indian ancestry. They are loathed and kept at arm's length by black Africans. Children and adults alike pass discriminatory comments about them and even sometimes, like in the case of Amin, sons are forbidden to marry them because they are impure and products of unacceptable relationships. The black community who are supposed to be their kith and kin brands them as impure Africans. It is from this setting that Rashid travels to Britain where he experiences another level of

racism among whites to black people and Asians to Africans. Though he cannot understand why the world is divided into a simplistic two sides; black and white, he is somehow compelled to accept this condition of otherness:

> Soon I began to say black people and white people, like everyone else, uttering the lie with increasing ease, conceding the sameness of our difference, deferring to a deadening vision of a racialised world. For by agreeing to be black and white, we also agree to limit the complexity of possibility, we agree to mendacities that for centuries served and will continue to serve crude hungers for power and pathological self-affirmations. (222)

By "sameness of our difference" he refers to the commonalities shared by people of different races who are bound together through migration, which in Gurnah's opinion is the "story of our time". As a critic, Gurnah disagrees with a unilateral and essentialist definition of an African. He believes that determining who is an African by simply judging from the skin colour is unjust and crude in a context as complex as Africa, as he exemplifies in *Desertion*, and is synonymous with racism because in both cases, people with rights of citizenship are marginalised, tormented and expelled. Gurnah's centralisation of complexities of colour, race, and ancestry in twenty-first century African literature calls to question existing postcolonial theory of otherness.

Though he is a male writer, his approach to fragmented conditions of postcoloniality collapses the boundaries of otherness and opens up possibilities that are obtainable in a multicultural Africa. The texts selected for this study further push the boundaries of "African identities" by engaging in a re-ordering of the process of otherness. El Saadawi's Egypt is as complex as Sindiwe Magona's South Africa and Westerhof's Zimbabwean conditions cannot be understood in essentialist framework of African identity. These writers, including Beyala and Adimora-Ezeigbo reconstruct otherness in the context of contemporary Africa. As African authors, their autobiographical works possess defining characteristics that show them as being

committed to underlining streams of otherness and the realities of Africa. This commitment projects their position as postcolonial writers whose voices are relevant in global literary space because of these "differences" they portray in their works.

Olaoluwa rightly captures "difference" or otherness as the core of the commitment of the postcolonial writer:

> Writers of the Third World must be seen as committed to an undeclared solidary obligation to reflect the identity and meaning of their postcolonial world in a manner that indicates their stake in the world; a compromise will otherwise defrock them of this status". ("The Author Never Dies").

Even though he does not use the term "otherness", the whole point of his essay is to differentiate the Third World text from Western text by emphasising writer's role in postcolonial writing. He opines that, whereas, the Western author can be separated from the text, separating the postcolonial author from her/his work will amount to meaninglessness. Olaoluwa's position however, seems to be unmindful of the possibility of subjecting a postcolonial text to either formalist or structuralist reading. He takes on Roland Barthe's theory that in a work of art, the author is separated from the material he has produced. In the context of postcolonial African writing, a critical examination of the pair "identity and meaning" shows that being able to identify a work by its content and form for instance, will produce meaning or better still understanding, that would not otherwise have been available if that identity was absent. Indeed, the overall project of postcolonial theory and criticism is to produce a framework for understanding the difference between Western and postcolonial literatures. Therefore, it can be said that postcolonial criticism thrives on "difference" as much as postcolonial literature especially life writing, as it seeks to narrate the context and life of the narrator.

Autobiography as a genre demands that the author write into her life, the cultural, historical, geographical, and socio-political context from which the self or subject of the

narration has developed. The narrator's experiences are organised consciously or unconsciously to highlight the influences of this context on the subject of narration. It should be noted that even for authors who are located outside Africa, their African origin is revealed in their autobiographical writing. Alison Rice's reading of three Maghrebian writers' autobiographical writing illuminates the influence of the African origin on Helene Cixous, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Assia Djeba. Notable in Rice's analysis of various texts authored by these trio, is her submission that the Maghrebian subject is attracted by travel for particular reasons that are peculiar to people from this region. Quoting the Moroccan writer, Khatibi, she explains that the "exposure" of the writer to:

> …the "narrowness" of the space of the "medina" or the oldest part of the city, shapes Khatibi's movements and trains him according to its curves and shapes. Interaction with others is determined by the lay-out of the labyrinth: his psychology, indeed his "strategy"… of "walking," "meeting" and even "fighting" are influenced by the width and angles of the streets and the buildings that line them. (134)

The physical structure of the labyrinth becomes Khatibi's resource in his writing. Furthermore, Rice argues that Djeba's fascination with the theme of "walking" and "movement" generally is informed by the freedom she was privileged to have as a teenage girl in Algeria owing to the "French school" that she had to attend. Compared with "her cousins who were forced to stay indoors throughout their teenage years and adult lives", Djeba was fortunate to have escaped the normal cloistering experienced by young Arab girls when they reach puberty in her native country" (265). Rice also situates Cixous "birthplace for the flight-figurative and literal…" which permeates her writing. By focusing on their origin as a potent force that shapes the creative works of these writers, Rice connects their lived experiences with the way they "theorize travel as

a fruitful method of opening one's eyes to others and to differences that lead to lively, dynamic textual creations" (262).

From Rice's argument, one may infer that despite the fact that these writers are highly mobile and located outside their birthplace, its effect is nonetheless palpable in their creative autobiographical writing and overall *oeuvre* as Francophone writers. More importantly, Rice's approach blurs the typical "Fracophonic" "othering" in literary criticism by contesting that their African origin only makes their works unique and not less accomplished or substandard to "French" literature.

This study pays attention to the origin of selected writers and explores the categories of otherness deployed in their texts as evidence to show that otherness is a multifarious concept that permeates contemporary African women's autobiography. By exploiting the variables engendered by the contexts of otherness, contemporary African women's autobiography manipulates conventions of autobiography to redefine womanhood and female conditions in postcolonial Africa.

3.7 Womanhood and Otherness in African Literature

The conceptualisation of African womanhood has been problematised by scholars and writers with a view to establishing peculiarities and differences between the sexualities, identities and experiences of African women and women of other colours and races. The search for what can be considered authentic identities of African women has led to an increase in theoretical postulations that not only show the differences in socio-cultural apprehension of womanhood in the various regions and states of the continent, but also opens up scholarship towards the study of these differences and possible commonalities. The contributions of Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Mary Kolawole, Obinna Nnaemeka, Mariama Ba, Mariam Tiali, Nana Jane

Opoku-Agyemang and Bessie Head among others are arrivals at the threshold of constructing the otherness of African womanhood and including it in feminist discourse.

More than any other discipline, literary studies has contributed theoretical paradigms for the conceptualisation of African womanhood by examining through characterization and thematic concerns the attempts by women to break away from patriarchal systems, recreating terms of gender relations and the roles of women in power relations. Flora Nwapa's, Buchi Emecheta's, and Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo's works overturn stereotypic portrayals of womanhood and reconstruct their sexuality, agency and relevance in both traditional and modern societies. They pay attention to female bonding and networking and the complementarities of gender roles between women and men in the African context. (Post) colonialism and modernity, with religion as a major component, are variables, which interact in the multiplicity of womanhood in Africa. In other words, the multiplicity of the perception of womanhood is informed by specificity of history and cultural issues.

Meaning, characteristics, and constituents of womanhood vary across Africa, with each variant showing religious, class, historical and ideological tendencies and also interrogating the monolithic description of African womanhood. Religious revivals like those of Sudan and Egypt for example have produced women whose identities and ideals of womanhood pose challenges to African feminist theorists. Saba Mahmood in "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival" argues that the mosque movement of Egypt poses a problem within feminist scholarship because the women of this movement employ the same set of idioms which are used "to assert their presence in previously male-defined spheres" to "secure their subordination". The values (set of idioms) this group of women ascribes to womanhood such as shyness, modesty, perseverance, and humility are the very tools of subjugating

women which feminism opposes. These women are comfortable with being confined to liminal space socially and politically, because they regard the acceptance of this condition as a parameter for assessing womanhood. Furthermore, the role of these women in the revival of Islamic system of belief and practice in the face of the Westernisation of the Egyptian society re-organises and in fact disorganises the concept of womanhood. Mahmood describes as unsettling an encounter with one of these women whom she sees as being shy and yet outspoken, candid and very confident, qualities that are opposed to one another in a secular context.

African women's narratives from the eighties have relentlessly interrogated the equation of African womanhood with motherhood, the image of the silenced, suffering, and powerless object of male chauvinism. Nfah-Abbenyi's and Kolawole's ground-breaking works, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference* (1997) and *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997), examine how female narrations have recovered the identity and agency of women by consciously subverting negative cultural practices, literary stereotypes and recreating new contexts for their self-actualization and reconstitution of womanhood. Women in these narratives are the subjects, heroines, and protagonists who participate actively in the constitution of their identities; they reject "names", "titles" and "attributes" which disable them and prevent them from asserting their womanhood.

The reproductive function of women in African societies is the most popular delineating feature of womanhood. Women are supposed to be mothers of children and reproducers. Reproduction as a role of women bars them from the public. As a follow-up to Simone de Beauvoir's theory, contemporary feminist critics argue that the divide between production and reproduction is actually a means of marginalising women's writing. They posit that in male-centred criticism, men produce fiction while women

reproduce their lives by writing autobiographically. In this criticism, women's writing is reduced to the autobiographical because women cannot "create" fiction but are bound to "reproduce" their lived experiences as an index of their gender difference. Mary-Kay Miller's study gives a sound appraisal of this approach to women's autobiographical texts. She explains that male and female autobiographical works have been distinguished by the way both genders relate with the maternal figure. While it is in order for male writers to distance the protagonist or subject from the maternal "other", "for the female writing subject to distance herself from the maternal is to find herself in a less stable territory". Senegalese women writers deploy the autobiographical, according to her, to regain female agency in the construction of womanhood and creative ability in literary practice. Miller states that:

> Although it leaves her in an ambiguous position, the female writer may have a special stake in putting to rest the maternal in her autobiographical texts: if she is finally to constitute herself as subject through her texts, it follows logically that she would not wish to attribute her origin to an Other, to a maternal source, nor would she want to turn her self-creative potential by positing herself to the mother figure. ((*Re)productions* 49).

Miller's argument touches on two important elements of otherness in African women's autobiographical writing. Women writers reconstitute womanhood by adopting the autobiographical and as writing subjects, reconceptualise motherhood as an arrangement that cripples originality and creativity. If the postcolonial writing subject regains subjecthood by creating fiction that reorders otherness, the postcolonial woman writer regains hers by engaging in the self-creative act of autobiography.

So far, we have provided the background, the aim and objectives of the study and the review of relevant literature. We have also presented the source of data, the methodology for the study and an outline of the theoretical frameworks for the data analysis. In the next three chapters, the theoretical frameworks highlighted and proposed in this chapter are put to test.

CHAPTER FOUR

VOCALITY AND RESISTANCE AS MARKERS OF OTHERNESS

4.0 Introduction

Vocality and resistance are a pair of features that have marked literary productions of most oppressed groups in literature, most especially autobiographical narratives of slaves from the eighteenth century and black autobiography generally. Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself,* Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself,* and Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American slave, Written by Himself,* are examples of slave narratives whose structures and concerns are patterned and developed towards the purpose of speaking against their experiences as slaves and using these narratives to fight for freedom (Alabi, 2005). Slave narratives were purposely written to transgress the boundaries of silence by showing that slaves possessed a voice and were able to express their desires and speak against their oppression and suppression. Thereby, they created texts from their experiences and those of others like them in order to nullify their depiction as beasts and properties that were unable to "speak".

Signs of vocality noticeable in slave autobiography include the ability to speak about issues that were not known to the public, the persistence of these slaves in fighting for their freedom and the growth of the autobiographical genre among slaves and ex-slaves who wanted to include their statements in the struggle against slavery. The slaves wrote about their painful and forced separation from their families, the hunger and beatings they suffered on plantations and the denial of their humanity by their owners. Female slaves bore in their bodies the marks of sexual abuse and the pains of bearing

children under most unfavourable conditions and textualised these marks in their autobiographies. Their vocality shows in the courage they possess in writing and making public details of their sexual lives and those of other female slaves who were sexually exploited by their masters. In the second place, they turn the tables against the discourse of slave holders by proving the bestiality of slave holders and the humanity of slaves. Adetayo Alabi's comparison of slaveholder's discourse in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is useful:

> About a century after the publication of The Tempest, however, the resistance tradition prefigured in Caliban is developed by slaves in their autobiographies... It is in these slave narratives that they argue that they had a culture before colonialism and that the rapist is not the slave, not the Calibans, but the slaveholders, the Prosperos. They contest this image by providing different accounts of how slaves are raped by their masters. The slaves contest their representation successfully in their autobiographies because their voices, unlike Caliban's in the Tempest, are not mediated by an English playwright (*Telling Our Stories* 51).

Up till the time slave autobiographies were produced, the slaves were seen as mute and their masters as being justified in treating them the way they did, but by seizing the self-expressive quality of autobiography, they disproved their muteness and the "kindness" of slaveholders. By Alabi's analysis, vocality and resistance are both cooperative elements that differentiate slave autobiographies from other types.

This chapter examines the underlying influences and narrative strategies which depict vocality and resistance in the construction of "self" and otherness in El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis*, Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* and Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love.* These texts are discussed as products of specific generations of African women and a counter-discourse to patriarchy, discriminatory religious beliefs, externally imposed image of otherness, and certain conventions of autobiography. This chapter also examines Saadawi's, Otieno's, and Westerhof's autobiographies, pointing out specifically how they are related because of their structure, the experience of colonialism, their treatment of

gender relations and class, issues of womanhood, motherhood, and marriage. The texts differ in terms of the migrant statuses of these women at the time of writing, health issues, and their style of writing.

4.1 Analysis of Texts

Literary criticism of the past two decades has vigorously created different theoretical dimensions for reading African women's texts, successfully separating them from and connecting them with wider feminist struggles against female oppression. African women writers adopt different positions in describing what they think they are doing in their works, whether they are feminists or not. The question of being Western and unAfrican by tending towards feminism as it is known and practised in the West would not have arisen if not for the vocality of women writers in "bringing not only their points of view but lived experiences as women to their writing" (Nfah-Abbenyi 8). Carole Boyce Davies explains that African feminism does not disagree with men over the need to wrest the continent from the shackles of Western domination but it disagrees with a generalised approach to addressing male and female oppression in the continent (9). African women critics and writers alike justify this stance by highlighting for instance, how women are treated as unequal members of families and societies. While African women speak of the specificity of their experiences, they do not entirely disconnect from Western feminism. As stated by Carole Davies,

> The obvious connection between African and Western feminism is that both identify gender-specific issues and recognize woman's position internationally as one of second class status and "otherness" and seek to correct that (10).

Lived experiences narrated in the first person singular pronoun, are a remarkable means by which women have sought to correct this imbalance and have also created a niche for themselves in feminism and African literature. Flora Nwapa's contribution, a pacesetter

of African women's literature, continues to resound because she succeeded in creating mouthpieces for women at a time when their voices were "muffled or effaced" in literature. She adopts the autobiographical form in two of her novels: *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970) as a forceful means of crossing boundaries. Kolawole reiterates this point: "In the later fiction by the precursor of African women's literature, Flora Nwapa, she re-presents women from a space of positive self-definition, revelation, rediscovery, and relocation. She has created this space not as a romantic afterthought but as an expression of reality as she saw it and lived it in her proximate setting of Igbo society as a paradigm" Lived experiences of African women provide materials for writing as they respond to their marginality and invisibility in literature. Buchi Emecheta's writing career also began from the autobiographical. *The Ditch* (1979) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974), are representations of the author's private life. Mariama Ba's epistolary autobiographical novel, *So Long a Letter* (1981), is among the women's texts that challenge patriarchy and canonical male writing in African literature.

In whatever genre they choose to express their realities, one of the things that they do is to recast the genre to accommodate their concerns. They capture their experiences in writing as a means of speaking for themselves. Boehmer observes that in apartheid South Africa especially, women found autobiography to be an appropriate medium for self-expression because:

> The autobiographical form allowed them to mould and voice an identity grounded in these diverse experiences of endurance and overcoming, of both typicality and singularity. The life-story was seen as a way of forging political solidarity, reaching out to black women caught in similar situations (217).

Boehemer draws our attention to how autobiography, different from other genres, enables the "voice" of these women to be heard as they grapple with multiple challenges and forces that seek to repress them.

It has been observed that black, specifically, African American autobiographies

are connected not only because of ethnic origins but also as a result of noticeable similarities between the styles of writing (Gates, Jr. *Bearing Witness* 4). Gates maintains that structural and linguistic convergences in black autobiography are evidence that these writers have read the works of their predecessors and follow in their style of presenting their life stories. Therefore, "the shaping of a black self in words" (4) can be linked with the shaping of "other" black selves and in this sense, the isolated subject of Gusdorf's theory of autobiography is in question. Apart from writing as a community with similar styles, black autobiographers consciously continue the "communal and resistant traditions" (Alabi 75) of slave narratives. This may be because unlike in the Western tradition where there is the visible presence of "canonized texts" and "an enshrined collective cultural memory", there "is the *absence* of a printed catalogued, collective cultural memory" (Gates, Jr. 5). The memory of slavery and the forced muteness of the black people, against which slave narratives speak, is a framework within which black autobiography is produced.

Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis* and Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* are titles that reveal the importance of naming to African women's autobiography. Their life stories are prefaced by titles that summarise their experiences and also show the women's choice in identifying with legendary or mythical figures that they consider precursors and extensions of self. They are precursors in the sense that these legends possess qualities that they admire and that they have patterned their lives after. Isis and Mau Mau are hidden influences who would not have been known to the reader in relation with Saadawi and Otieno except by the names these writers have taken up in their autobiographies. Saadawi and Otieno have also constructed for self specific images that potentially mark them out as being different from other women that might be encountered in both texts.

Naming in this way is a function of speakability or vocality, that is, the ability to speak for self and others. The crux of feminist debates over naming stems from the innate

urge of African women to speak about their concept of feminism and how it applies to their experiences and not to rely on what women from other parts of the world consider important definitive contents of feminism. The consciousness that being named by the west is a direct or indirect way of perpetrating colonial dominance to a large extent informs the radical rejection of the term feminism by African writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Theorists also situate African women's concept of feminism within the realities or experiences of their lives as Africans, favouring the term African womanism (Kolawole, 1997). Likewise, Saadawi names self as "a daughter of Isis" and Otieno names self as "Mau Mau's daughter". Their life stories attest to their association with these names. Isis is an Egyptian goddess who was reputed to have loved the marginalised of her society, just like Saadawi prefers to identify with this same group in her family and society. Westerhof names self as the one that is "unlucky in love" and tells her stories of woe with men. Otieno retains the fighting spirit of Mau Mau as she confronts colonialism through armed struggle and rewrites an official story about her great-grandfather. She also fights back at her late husband's family and their attempt to repress her and her children. The names they choose become overarching framework for the themes they discuss and the strategies of representing self and other.

The nominal phrases used by the three authors to describe self follows after African praise poetry in which subjects are given names in accordance with certain histories within or without experiences of the family and individual that is being praised. In addition to this, Barber explains that *oriki* or praise poetry among Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is characterised by the fact that they "affirm the distinctiveness of their subjects" and that "they are also agents of transcendence" (14). The past in African cultures is not a sealed and detached moment in the present because for the living, the dead is a reality. Barber reiterates this point:

> In oriki of individuals and of social groups, this transcendence includes a transcendence of time. The past is reactivated in the present. ... prominent men of the past, predecessors of the living, are evoked in the midst of the activity of the present generation. At the time of composition, each oriki refers to the here and now. They encapisulate whatever is noteworthy in contemporary experience... They are then valued all the more for coming from the past, and bringing with them something of its accumulated capabilities, the attributes of earlier powers (14).

Saadawi and Otieno avail themselves of these capabilities by invoking their choice legendary figures from the histories of their respective societies. They both authenticate their uniqueness through the link they establish with these figures. More important, they exercise their power as the owner of their discourse in line with the Oloto theory, by choosing names that highlight their otherness.

Structurally, Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis* and Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* follow the same pattern. The texts open with issues that will later form the crux of their narratives. They narrate their experiences as female children who were not received as well as male children, young women who had to fight against suppression in and outside their immediate families, and political activists who spoke against oppressive colonial and corrupt indigenous governments. Their narratives are punctuated by experiences that sought to strip them of their rights as members of their families and societies and their resistance to these experiences. They give much space to the experiences of other girls and women, showing how they (the narrators) have surpassed other women and even men in resisting patriarchy and the mediocrity that has marked the lives of these women and men. They pay special attention to some details that portray the strength of a vocal woman against a docile one in order to highlight their achievements. They also build a strong case for women's rights in their respective societies by revealing the effects of subjugation and discrimination against women.

Nawal El Saadawi was born in Kafr Tahla, Egypt, in 1931, while Wambui Waiyaki Otieno was born in Thogoto, Kenya, in 1936. Unlike El Saadawi who begins her

story with her parents and the different roles they play in shaping her life and writing career, Otieno starts with her great-great grand parents tracing her genealogy to both sides of her maternal and paternal ancestry. She clearly states that the reason for doing this is to show "our courageous ancestress" whose life story has been effaced from the family story:

> Had her origins been preserved and her history handed down, we would today be referred to as the Kaputiei lineage rather than the Waiyaki line. I find it to be very discriminatory that a person is referred to as "son or daughter of Mr. so-and-so." I prefer that people be referred to as "son or daughter of Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so…" (11).

Otieno's preference for reflecting both sides speaks against patriarchal tradition in African societies where the woman's memory is erased systematically as lineages are traced only from the man's line. She bears three names; her first name, Wambui, her father's family name, Waiyaki and her husband's- Otieno. These names throughout the narrative stand for various aspects of her life and the struggles she faces as a woman. By starting from her father's maternal lineage, she hints at the rebellion she is later to carry out about her children's lineage, which she cuts off from their father's family and clan.

El Saadawi's autobiography was originally written in Arabic and later translated into English by her husband, Sherif Hetata. She demonstrates her otherness by portraying herself as an "other" to men, Western women, and even Arab women. She writes as a witness and participant who, in the words of Alabi is privileged to "write about and interpret events" as a critique of contemporary discourses (12). The thrust of her narration is on the discriminating and oppressive experiences she had as a girl-child in an Islamic society. According to her, she writes about issues "people do not speak about": female circumcision, sexual exploitation of women, early marriage in Islam, and injustices against women in a patriarchal African society. Probably because of her career as a prominent African and Arab writer, she opens her autobiography with a

story about her first exposure to writing. Learning to write as a form of self-expression is positioned by El Saadawi as the singular most important thing to the construction of this conscious "self" and in the first page of the autobiography, she narrates how she learns how to write.

> It was my mother who taught me how to read and write. The first word I wrote was my name, Nawal. I loved the way it looked. It meant a 'gift'. My name became a part of me. Then I learnt my mother's name, Zaynab. I loved the way they looked, side by side, and what they meant. Every day she taught me to write new words. I loved my mother more than my father. But he removed my mother's name from next to mine, and wrote down his instead. I kept asking myself why he had done that. (1).

As a child, she puts herself beside her mother but she is separated from her by the act of her father's "writing". The father who is a symbol of patriarchy and the community she grows up to write against, upturns the initial joy that she derives from writing. She learns from childhood that "it is God's will" that the woman be "written out" "and abolished as though she did not exist" (1). Furthermore, the invocation of the divine in silencing the child makes her suspicious of this group, "father and God" as against "self and mother" who are joined and at once separated through "writing". Writing then becomes a weapon of coming into existence for the latter group and a weapon of oppression wielded by the former.

El Saadawi and Otieno do not actually narrate their birth until the second chapters of their books while they make their opening statements as a kind of personal manifesto and introduction. El Saadawi's "Preface" is titled "The Gift" while Otieno's first chapter is titled "Family Origins". Though they approach the issue of the erasure of women's names from history in different ways, they both resist this tradition by writing women first before men and giving mothers the same space given to fathers. In African settings, ancestry plays a central role in the way an individual is received within their communities. This is more visible when young people propose to get married. Family members from the men's and women's sides would like to investigate ancestral connections to establish the suitability of

both of them. Possible diseases, negative public images of generations before the couple, are very important factors that are considered before marriage is contracted. In the second place, as evident in oral autobiographical poetry, Africans do not just mention their ancestors, they boast about them and reveal their strength, achievements, and contributions to their societies and for the purpose of the present, they connect their own life experiences with their ancestry. These women's vocality is revealed in the act of rewriting an aspect of tradition, which ordinarily is out of women's preserve in patriarchy.

The circumstance of El Saadawi's birth as narrated to her by her paternal grandmother is foundational to the resilience she shows towards life-threatening and harsh conditions. The second child and first female among nine children, El Saadawi's birth was greeted by silence, a sign of rejection. If she were to be a male child, the waiting family members would have shouted *yoo-yoo*, a sound of rejoicing but the mid-wife gave "a sound of deep regret" (20). Indeed, the newborn child was dropped in a basin and left by the mother to struggle for life. She says "I do not know how I foiled death during the first moments of my life. Maybe a Satanic will took hold of me" (21). She was clearly an unwanted child because of her sex. Otieno does not go into the details of her birth but her childhood; she narrates only important aspects of this period, which reflect the treatment of children and women in her society. Of interest to her is the killing of her goat by her father for the pleasure and entertainment of his friends. She had taken care of this goat, named Ngoto for a while and developed a kind of bond with it only for it to be slaughtered without prior notice and apologies from her father. She wept the whole day for this act of "cruelty". This event continues to affect her perception of her father and she concludes this story by pointing out the fact that her father's action was only a part of the patriarchal framework, in which "[m]en generally looked down upon women and children" (26).

While Islam and traditional practices are highlighted in El Saadawi's childhood,

Christianity, colonialism, and tradition are the focus of Otieno's narration of childhood experiences. She is critical of the hard labour to which children, men and women are subjected by colonial authorities. As an autobiography that centres on Mau Mau struggles, it is not surprising that as early as her girlhood, Otieno has developed a mindset that recognises the British as "taskmasters" who would not exempt pregnant women from the digging of trenches. In the introduction to the text, Cora Anne Presley comments on the importance of women's voices in the postcolonial discourse:

> Wambui's story told by herself to an international audience, thus becomes an important political tract for those interested in African women's voices, political strife in contemporary African states, and postcolonial deconstruction… For those of us who are observers and students of her and the history she helped to make, the recital allows us to share her vision and reflect on how we shape our own image and representation (1).

It is in line with this image that Otieno introduces the reader to her experiences as a girl-child in a colonial setting. She mingles political activism with marital and familial issues throughout the autobiography as a way of projecting her centrality in the history of Kenyan politics. As a narrative technique, she allows the reader to pass a judgement on the colonial government, which would not spare pregnant women from forced labour and also distinguish the experiences of colonized women from men just as women slaves depict the double burden of slavery; being a woman and a slave.

For Otieno and Saadawi, their school-days as children were characterised by varying degrees of challenges, which to the ordinary girl would have been enough to keep them away from school or make them succumb to pressures from their families and the school systems in their countries. Both narrators, especially El Saadawi, pointedly describe many experiences in their lives as girls when it seemed the whole world system was against them but despite the odds, they were able to make something out of their lives and on the whole, present a counter-discourse to the notion that the girl-child is only good for marriage

at an early age and not education. Through this counter-discursive strategy, Otieno and El Saadawi's autobiographies demonstrate that otherness can be empowering and even celebrated as a mark of humanity and resilience. Even as Muslims in an Arab- African society, El Saadawi's parents were not opposed to sending their daughters to school to obtain Western education. El Saadawi gives us a background to this posture. As far back as the late nineteen twenties, her father had defied his poor background and risen to the position of an inspector of education and was the "first village man to have graduated from Dar Al-Oloum and the first to discard the *giba* and *kaftan* for a suit, a tie and a fez" (42). He was given the title, "Al-Sayed Effendi, a title of respect given to more educated people who usually became government officials" (42). El Saadawi also highlights the educational achievements of the Shoukry-Bey, her maternal family. Her grandfather was the Director General of Military Conscription who had also sent his daughters, El Saadawi's mother and aunts, to school.

However, it seems El Saadawi's parents only sent her to school to obtain the minimum qualification that would usher her into early marriage. At this point in the narrative, El Saadawi reintroduces the death motif, which marked her uncelebrated entrance into the world. Only that this time, it is her dream of becoming a university graduate and being "different" which her parents and the extended family patriarchy in conjunction with Islam, seek to kill. She recalls that at the age of ten, suitors were already on a line-up coming to ask for the girl-child's hand in marriage. In the chapter titled "Uncles, Suitors and Other Bloodsuckers", she describes her ordeal on the night before the visit of the first suitor. She opens this chapter with a statement of her life goal:

> The word everyone gave me a feeling of emptiness. I wanted to be someone. I could not imagine that I would live and die like anyone else, without anything happening during my life. But what was it that I expected, that I wanted to happen? … I would not be like other girls, not like my grandmother or my mother, or my aunts, or other women in the family. Nor did I want to be like my grandfather, or my father, or my uncles or the other men in the family. (138)

Her statement establishes the individualistic and internal approach to otherness, which the Oloto theory expounds and is embraced by contemporary African women autobiographers. From the analysis of both feminist and postcolonial theories, otherness is a category imposed on women by men/the society and assigned to the colonised by the colonisers or the West to designate the rest of the world. Whereas both in autobiography and the Oloto discourse, the definer of otherness is the writing or speaking subject who constructs various paradigms of otherness and also speaks from a vintage position to determine the criteria for otherness. El Saadawi's quest for otherness is informed by her assessment of the lives of "others" that are older than she is and have not been able to satisfy the standards for otherness which she has set for "self". Rather than undermine her strength as the speaking "other", her femaleness accentuates and reinforces it, giving an edge over the majority in the first category of grandmother, mother, aunts, and other women that have accepted the weak, incapable, and the conventional image of the woman as the weak, docile and muted "other" of man. She shows that in spite of the fact that she belongs to the same sex with these women, she is not at all like them.

Therefore, El Saadawi's clever rejection and ejection of her suitor is in pursuit of her goal of otherness. The night before the visit of the suitor, her aunts have given her a thorough scrub, brushing her blackened teeth with salt until they bleed and ripped off the hair on her limbs, despite her screams, in order to present an acceptable bride to the suitor. Up till this point in the narration, she has heard and seen female children being given out in marriage and has processed this culture in her mind many times but does not consider herself as a likely victim. As a child, she possessed an awareness that was above average and was always questioning the way things were done around her. She cannot understand why they have to subject her to such a torture for the sake of any man and she asks further:

> How could ripping the hair of my body be to my best interest? Instinct told me that it was against my dignity, that hair was power. What would I gain if my skin became smooth and hairless like a snake's? What kind of desire or passion other than the urge to violate, or humiliate would be aroused in a man seeking a body like that? (142)

We are not surprised that on the following day, the "pointed spike" of her "heel caught in the hole" of the carpet (147), causing the tray to tip over and the cups of coffee and cold water that were meant to entertain the suitor literally became his bathing water.

El Saadawi's critic of early marriage resounds throughout her narration as she gives the reader details of her friends, classmates, cousins and neighbours that have fallen into the misfortune of early marriage. Starting from the stories her paternal grandmother, Sittil Hajja, has told her about the ordeal of the child-bride on her wedding night, El Saadawi critiques this tradition in her grandmother's village. She depicts the wedding nights of many girls, paying attention to the details of the rites that are performed on them. Her grandmother was married off to a man she never loved at the age of ten, before she commenced her menstruation. A group of women headed by Um Mahmoud were responsible for breaking the child's hymen before leaving her at the mercy of the groom who was also ready with his cane to flog her before tasting her food according to this tradition.

According to the story narrated to her by her grandmother, the man would have to do this in order to let the bride know that "Allah was above, and her husband was below, and she should be ready for a beating if she did not do as she was told." (31). The man made divorce and marriage a past time. In fact in the grandmother's word "[t]he only verses of the Qu'ran which he knew were 'Marry as many women as seems good to you. Your women are as land to be plowed by you, so plow them when you wish', and 'Abandon their bed and chastise them.'" (26). In the footnote to this page in the text, an explanation of the last statement is given as "Meaning, punish your women by not sleeping with them and by

beating them" (26). She highlights her grandmother's experience as a strategy to expose how men like her grandfather, use the cover of religion to repress and oppress women. It is pertinent to mention here that El Saadawi has been at different times castigated for feeding her Western audience with exaggerated portraiture of Islamic doctrines and the treatment of women in Arab societies (Amireh, 2000). By including her grandmother's story as a background to her projection of marriage in traditional Arab village, she hopes to authenticate her criticism of this and other practices as non-fictional but realities of the conditions of women.

Otieno's experience differs on the issue of early marriage and some of the other issues raised in El Saadawi's autobiography. However, she recalls her resistance to the official story they are told in schools and that are contained in colonial writing about the encounter between her great-grandfather and a white man. The official version as contained in Brigadier General Herbert H. Austin and J.W. Gregory's books, has it that Waiyaki, Wambui's great-grandfather had entered into an agreement with the British representative Frederick Lugard, that he would allow them to establish a station in his kingdom. Contrary to this treaty, according to this version, Waiyaki ordered an unprovoked attack on Mr. Purkiss, the man that probably took over from Frederick Lugard. As counter-discourse to this story about Waiyaki's treachery, Otieno writes her own version that the British were the first to violate the treaty by attempting to forcefully occupy the Kikuyu land. The ruler, Waiyaki, naturally reacted by ordering a war against them twice, resulting in the loss of many guards on the side of the British. Later, in Otieno's version, Waiyaki was clubbed in the head and arrested as he drank in celebration of their victory over the British.

Again, there are two versions to the death of Waiyaki. His people believed he "was buried alive with his head in the soil and legs sticking up in the air" while the British has it that "Waiyaki died by his own hand on the way to Kibwezi" (17). It is pertinent to note that

as a schoolgirl, Otieno's questioning of the official version of this history marks the beginning of her political awareness and rebellion. She also rebels against the English name given to her "Virginia Tiras", which Miss Brownly her teacher, loves to call her. The teacher's attempt to erase Otieno's African name, Wambui, is symbolic as it represents one of the "humanising" ventures of the colonizers on the colonized. Moreover, they are taught Scottish dance and discouraged from "tribal dances". Again, she rebels by learning all the tribal dances and songs. In this framework, the African name is no name, and the African dance is "sinful" and "barbaric" and in the context of colonial power relations, the colonizer employs one of "the repressive apparatuses" at her hand to efface and cannibalise existing "precolonial systems" (Alabi 50). Otieno's resistance earns her constant punishment in school, while her mates accept the status quo. She stands out and reinforces her portrait of otherness by narrating these acts of subversion, which she engages in as a young schoolgirl. As a postcolonial writer and in the tradition of slave narratives, Otieno rewrites history and resists hegemonic colonial discourse on Kikuyu history and African culture.

While Otieno's text centres on her immediate family, Kikuyu, and national histories to show her role and prominence in the three spheres, El Saadawi devotes her text to cultural and religious practices that subjugate women through her narration of immediate and extended families' histories. This is a continuum of her previous fictional and non-fictional writings in which she has consistently spoken against repressive structures in and outside her society. As a result of this commitment, she does not present her life story in the conventional form in which unpleasant and very private family issues are not included in the autobiography. On the contrary, *A Daughter of Isis* x-rays the hidden and unpleasant facts about El Saadawi's family. She seizes the authority of the narrator-participant to reveal the inner workings of families that may look normal or envied by an outsider. She distinguishes her otherness from that of other women by presenting sharp and contrastive

images of them in her autobiography.

The narration of her aunties illustrates this point. In the chapters titled “Mad Aunts and Abandoned Babies” and “The House of Desolation”, El Saadawi recounts the year she spent in her late maternal grandfather’s house. An unfortunate occurrence had taken place in her school where one of the girls had abandoned her baby in the toilet. This gave every girl in her school a negative image and they were all greeted with suspicion in the neighbourhood. At that time, they had a housegirl, Shalabeya, who was badly treated by her aunt, Tante Ni’mat. This girl was discovered to be pregnant and El Saadawi’s aunt demanded to know who was responsible for it but she maintained that she didn’t know because she was afraid to name the man who happened to have been one of El Saadawi’s uncles, Yehia Bey. The girl’s silence infuriated Tante Ni’mat who proceeded to flog her until she would confess. According to El Saadawi, the girl was under severe flogging for several minutes up to a point that she (El Saadawi) had to snatch the cane from the woman. A feat she attributes to her strength and the aunt’s overweight and weakness. Unfortunately, nobody agreed to marry the girl and she became the cause of every woe that had befallen Tante Ni’mat before and those that befell her after the incident. In the analysis El Saadawi does that night:

> When I was alone at night I remembered Shalabeya, and wept over her. She was a child, only fourteen years old, like me, a child who had become a victim, been made a scapegoat, transformed into the sacrificial lamb to be butchered in place of the Bey. There was nothing to prove his guilt. He had received some education, the knowledge necessary to commit his crime without leaving any fingerprints behind… but the girl… her parents were living in upper Egypt, and there a girl with a bastard child in her belly must be punished by death without question. So the one that committed the crime went unpunished, free. It was the cruelty of our world, the cruelty of abandoned, frustrated women, like Tante Ni’mat and others like her. (195)

There are two groups in her analysis, the oppressed and the oppressor. Shalabeya is clearly the oppressed while her aunt plays the role of the oppressor as a representative

of oppressive societal structures. But in a twist of these roles, Tante Ni'mat was a woman who was "abandoned" by her husband the same way the Bey had refused to take responsibility for the pregnancy, an offence punishable by death in Islamic system of justice. In this case, men became the oppressors while women were the oppressed. By describing this incident, El Saadawi shifts the rigid inter-gender analysis of oppression to another level, the intra-gender, which is a thread that runs through her writing.

In all this, she is the "writing subject", constructing otherness in the context of her vocalising the realities of unspeakable aspects of a religious society. She textualises the otherness of two subjects, the silent and abandoned women whose experiences are normally not spoken about in mainstream male canonical autobiography. This omission in African men's autobiographical writing excludes an important aspect of women's reality because, as rightly asserted by Cynthia Ward, whatever is "un-textualizable" is in fact, that which is "real" and "human". So then, the humanity of this group is denied when their experiences are written out of the "text".

The space she gives to the subaltern in her text is a testimony to the ideology for which she has stood in African and Arabic literature. During an interview with Sophie Smith, Saadawi categorises the world system into two broad groups:

> It is a post-modern capitalist patriarchal society in which women are inferior to men, in which the working class are inferior to the people who own the wealth and the money, in which the black people and the African people, the Asian people, the so-called 'third world' (I don't call it the third world), people living in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America are considered slaves and are exploited by the so-called first world. We live in a world that is dominated by this system, one system where the top of the hierarchy constitutes a few families, and a few multinationals own 80% of the wealth and the trade. They live in Europe, in Paris and London, in Washington D.C. and New York, and they are very, very few, about 500 people and 500 multinationals. Of course, the numbers differ - these are the figures of some years ago - today there are maybe 600, maybe 550, but nevertheless there is still a very small minority of multinationals of men and women who own 80% of the wealth of the world where the majority of the people in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America, in the Arab world are certainly starving. (62)

Her position on oppression goes beyond gender and extends to economic and political systems globally. Her devotion to speaking for the oppressed group materialises in at least four chapters of her autobiography, “The Village of the Forgotten Employees”, “The Lost Servant-Girl”, “The Ministry of Nauseation”, and “The Whiskered Peasant”. Each of these chapters is a treatise on how the haves and the powerful dominate spheres of human activity and living to the disadvantage of the have-nots and the powerless. In “The Village of Forgotten Employees”, she tells of her father’s experience as an inspector of education in a village called Menouf for ten years. This transfer, as noted by Saadawi, was to punish her father who had become vocal against the government and corrupt monarchy in Egypt. He was “not given a single salary increase and was deprived of all promotions. He had been put on the black list, included in a category known in the Ministry of Education as ‘forgotten employees’” (80). Using her father’s case as an entry point, she writes about this group of forgotten people for whom no one would speak or write.

Generally, throughout the narrative, El Saadawi strengthens the image of a resolute and conscious “self” by depending on portraiture of the “other” as an element that drives the construction of a distinct identity within a social and religious setting that does not support this type of consciousness. As Virginia Woolf shows in her autobiographical writing, a woman’s upbringing in a stifling patriarchal setting has great implications for how much of herself she can know in relation to others. Woolf criticises “her Victorian upbringing”, which isolates her from a “community in which she could learn and against which she could measure herself” (Benstock 24), because she is not in a position to know how different she is from other people. Fortunately for El Saadawi, she has a community from which she can learn, even though she opposes everything the community stands for as long as it will not allow her to exist as a free-thinking, free speaking human being with

equal rights as the man. Alabi, in discussing the resistance framework of slave narratives, explains that one of the similarities between slave narratives and women's writings is that both adopt "counter-discursive" approach, "the counter-discursive force of slave narratives links them with women's writings. Just as slave narratives develop alternative constructions about slaves, women's chart different orders of women's realities from what patriarchy hands down". (52).

For women, writing "believable" and "real" stories of women's struggles cannot be compromised since it precedes the seriousness with which their writings are to be received. Moreover, like colonial discourse, patriarchy universalises male experience and dismisses the ability of the woman to speak for herself or narrate experiences that are different from what patriarchal literature has represented. That is to say, the female "I" is to be subsumed in the male "I" or "we". As slaves write "I" into being through autobiography, the African woman autobiographer writes the distinctiveness of her experiences into being, thereby resisting the male "I" or "we".

It is worth mentioning here that the act of writing "I" by the African woman autobiographer has far reaching implications for her as a member of an African community. Alabi discusses Olney's position on defining African autobiography and points out that while comparing Western and African autobiographies, Olney acknowledges the pungent communal voice in African autobiography. According to Alabi, this informs Olney's naming of African autobiography as *autophylography*, meaning broadly speaking, tribal autobiography. While he disagrees with Olney's naming because the latter has picked a Greek terminology to describe an African practice, he agrees with "the communal focus" he identifies in African autobiography. (ibid, 6). Like Alabi, Oriaku also agrees that African autobiography can be identified by its communal nature. In his monograph "Autobiography as Literature", Oriaku specifically mentions Nigerian autobiography and describes the

narrative voice as being "at the same time personal and collective, in its personal aspect it highlights the unique role of the author as an individual and in its collective aspect it celebrates and shows reverence for the ways of his people and ancestors" (28). He seems to imply that what makes it Nigerian is that it agrees or subscribes to the "ways of his people and ancestors", whereas it may not be Nigerian if it speaks against it. While it may be convenient for the male African autobiographer to agree with his society, the female may not simply because the society is structured to favour men above women, making women the "other".

As a trend in African women's autobiography, *A Daughter of Isis* and *Mau Mau's Daughter* speak against "myth of vocality" which entrenches the marginality of African women in gender relations and even literary practice. This myth according to Grace Okereke dictates the form and content of female literary expression so that whatever is exclusively female, domestic, private and personal is not only inferior but also cannot be subjected to serious theorising or academic enquiry. Politics, economy, and related discourses are supposed to be the male preserve while women may engage in other sentimental and "not too serious" issues. She comments further: [t]he male writer's exploration of apparently larger 'universal' issues is seen as symbolic of the openness, externality and vocality of the male world, whereas, the female writer's concern with the private, the enclosed and circumscribed is seen as symbolic of the secrecy, interiority and 'silence' of the female world (143).

However, as counter-discursive texts to this myth, El Saadawi and Otieno's autobiographies are not exclusively private. They both touch on political issues such as the British occupation of Egypt, the struggle against colonialism in Kenya, the corruption and decadence that have marked African governments, and Islamic fundamentalism among others, which have engaged both male and female critics and

theorists in African literature. Their political activism at different levels and different contexts has threatened their lives and those of their immediate family members. El Saadawi's autobiography was written while she was in exile in the United States; she has been imprisoned severally by the government of Egypt, while at various times, Otieno's active participation in Mau Mau and even post-independence struggles made her a regular face in the prison of the British government and earned her physical abuse under Arap Moi's administration.

It is important to situate Otieno's autobiography within the larger tradition of Mau Mau autobiography which has a unique history different from autobiography in other parts of Africa. The first thing to note is that there have been several controversies based on the ethnic/tribal disunity among Kenyans. It seems the Gikuyu ethnic group, from which Otieno, Jomo Kenyatta and other notable fighters come, has been accused of monopolising the Mau Mau discourse, singing songs that are Gikuyu and chanting slogans that reflect the cultural beliefs of this ethnic group. At the time she published her autobiography, there had been at least eight others written by male and a few female Mau Mau activists (Presley, "Introduction"). Fictional writings also have contributed immensely to the image of the Mau Mau activist and the role s/he played in the fight for freedom. Otieno's text attests to the fact that the Gikuyu ethnic group has had a fair share of publicity and focus as the most active and probably the roots of Kenyan heroes. However, as a continuity of the silence that has surrounded the participation of women in African nationalism, not much has been written about the roles, travails, and details of women's activities at this period in the history of Kenya. We can say then that Otieno's work is an opener to this aspect of freedom fighting which has been downplayed in male Mau Mau autobiographies. She writes "self" and focuses also on "others" namely women who have not been included in men's narratives. In addition, she writes to set

records straight about her role and also the burial saga of her husband. Therefore, her work can be described as a two-edged instrument of correction. Her story then presents a "self" versus "others" who have either opposed or undermined her femininity and character. She sustains this position through a number of methods which are analysed in the following paragraphs.

More than six of the twelve chapters of Otieno's autobiography focus on her development as a Mau Mau fighter, initiation, and actual involvement in the activities of the group. Presley in her introduction to the autobiography acknowledges the exceptionality and importance of Otieno's narrative within the larger structure of autobiographies and historical documentations of the Mau Mau struggles:

> Wambui Waiyaki Otieno's memoir is a unique narrative, singular as an authentic nonfiction account of Kenyan woman's role in politics from the 1950s to the 1990s, authored by herself. The Otieno narrative is one of two autobiographies by Kikuyu women describing the Mau Mau era. The other autobiography of the period is Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969). However, *Daughter of Mumbi* is written almost exclusively from a child's point of view and does not yield the kind of reflection and analysis of mature women. Most important, Waciuma was not involved in the political struggle. She was a schoolgirl at the time and did not, as did Wambui Waiyaki, choose to abandon her home and family and join the nationalist struggle. (1).

It is definitely not a light thing for a woman to make such a huge sacrifice for her nation at the risk of losing her life. Of interest to this study is Otieno's narrative as a female insider. What image of "self" does she project within the context of collective struggles against colonialism? How does she transgress patriarchal boundaries to become a celebrated fighter? How does her narrative support the *Oloto* theory of otherness?

Otieno's narrative of the Mau Mau days flows smoothly from the third chapter of the text to the last. She mingles even her personal and family histories with experiences in the Mau Mau. It is obvious that she sets out to respond to commentaries and books

that have all touched on the participation of women in the fight for freedom in Kenya. The themes of bravery, survival, resilience, dogged dedication, cooperation, and communal struggles provide a literary frame around the whole text. She introduces gender roles and female networking at various points in the narrative to emphasise the impact of women's activities in the fight for freedom. Starting from her initiation rites into the Mau Mau, she underlines the importance of bravery as an indispensable attribute for any freedom fighter, irrespective of their gender. She recalls her first initiation as a sixteen-year-old girl and intimates the reader with the vital background to her interest in the membership of the group. As a young girl, she is familiar with Jomo Kenyatta's pronouncements, has read his autobiographical book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, thereby equipping herself with the necessary information she needs at least to be able to know that there is a fight for freedom going on in her country. She also has at the back of her mind a mission to avenge "the brutal treatment" her "great-grandfather Waiyaki wa Hinga had suffered in the hands of the colonialists" (33).

Although she claims that she was initially unaware of the fact that it was the Mau Mau oath she had taken on the visit to Gaitumbi in the company of her cousin and another woman, she eventually, with full knowledge of the implications, takes eight more oaths thereby sealing her membership of the group. She takes the highest oath, Mbatuni, which is "administered only to the real fighters and scouts" and launches herself into the mainstream fight against colonialism. From this point in the narrative, Otieno assumes fully the characteristics of a freedom fighter and changes her diction to reflect this change. Her choice of words establishes the commitment she has towards seeing that her country is freed from colonial powers. The colonial government is described as "the panicked colonial government"; there are "black collaborators"; her spirit becomes a "fighting" one; and shortly after her initiation she displays her resolve

to resist colonialism in the way she handles her protest against the treatment meted out to her mother by a colonial policeman.

The policeman called Peter had "almost hit" her mother on the head in their homestead after a state of emergency had been declared in 1952. It happens that her father, an officer in the police force has just been arrested and with her siblings all abroad, she is left alone in Kenya with their mother. She demonstrates her boldness and courage on this incident and underscores the extent to which she has gone as a woman to fight colonialism. Against her mother's wish, Otieno proceeds to the District Officer to lodge a complaint against Peter and requests that the man be transferred from that duty post. She jumps the queue much to the assistant DO's displeasure and a series of actions takes place:

> He shouted at me and I shouted back. I intended to make as much of a scene as possible. My anger at my mother's treatment was so great that I did not care if they killed me for confronting them. The Home Guards cocked their guns menacingly at me, and I dared them to shoot me. I was too angry to care. (36)

This scene reads like one of those we find in fictional accounts of Kenya during the Mau Mau days. Otieno's story about her encounter with colonial officers confirms her vocality even in the face of death. She defends her mother and also prepares herself for the more risky business of the Mau Mau organization, which she is later to fully partake in as the narration progresses. As it will be shown in the following paragraphs, Otieno's autobiography disproves the notion that African autobiography, following in the oral tradition and communal structure of its societies, only narrates the achievements of the group "more than the particular contributions of any one person. Her text is a "very personal narrative, the voice of a woman…" (5).

After the event narrated in the previous paragraph, Otieno concentrates on the struggles against colonialism and the roles of those who have not been included in

previous Mau Mau autobiographies. The list includes non-African supporters of the cause, unsung song composers, and women. She recalls the protest march and petition for the release of Jomo Kenyatta. Asian and European sympathisers to the fight for freedom joined in the protest by signing the petition in order to increase the number of people who were in support of the petition. Kenyan fighters needed the support of other nationals in order to add more weight to their protest and petition. She writes:

> We thought that if signatories included Asians, Arabs, and Europeans it would carry more weight. Many Asians signed the petition. Manubhai Patel and his wife helped very much in obtaining Asian signatories. Europeans, headed by V.S. Cook and R.S. Alexander, also signed; but when we saw that the number of European signatures was very small we decided that we would buy several different Biro pens and put down signatures using European and Asian names that were simple and popular… When these petitions were taken to the governor, they were considered more valuable because they contained signatures from individuals from all races. (56)

She acknowledges the contribution of these people to the success of the struggle. The singers were also mentioned as part of the contributors to the success of the Mau Mau campaign against colonial powers. She points out that songs were a powerful means of moving the crowd, passing across their manifesto and statements of intent or objectives to their people and even colonial officials. But more important, the songs boosted their morale any time they were down and in need of encouragement. She mentions the names of individuals such as Musa Nyandusu, Nathan Ayieza, and John Bwana Matanga and also "Mwangi, who played his violin and sang mwomboko freedom songs" (58). Her detailing of the efforts of this set of people does not only lend voice to collective struggle but also draws the reader's attention to the importance of this aspect of the struggle and put names on nameless and unknown song composers who gave the Mau Mau struggles creeds and strength through songs.

She goes on to narrate the activities of women's groups and party members who were as important as the leaders of the fight for freedom. The women's roles include

some espionage work, deception and distraction of colonial officials in order to obtain information, divert and avert attacks on the revolutionary fighters in the bush. She takes care to narrate specific events and actions of these women. They are focused on as a group of fighters, who were indispensable to those carrying arms in the bush and those involved in strategic planning. She portrays them in the narrative as actors who gave up selfish and personal interests in the battle to free Kenya. She says “we all suffered in one way or another” (57). One of these women, Hannah Wanjiku Kung’u, had premature delivery during a protest march due to the inhumane treatment she received from the agents of colonial authorities. The plural pronoun “we” marked the narration of many group efforts and roles.

However, it is clear that she sets out to narrate her personal role, influence, and sacrifice during the Mau Mau days. While the presence of the plural “we” is strong in the text, the singular “I” seems to overshadow it and throw the collective only to the background of the stories. Beginning from the early days of Mau Mau, Otieno underscores “self” from “others” by narrating particular events in which she participated. Others feature in most of the stories she tells as long as they have something to do with her projection of a brave and dynamic “self”. Even though she tries to cover up the praise of “self”, she is quick to point out how she is different from all others in many instances. In a situation where collective resistance to colonialism was going on, one might be expecting that individual experiences, characteristics should be subsumed within the group’s. Otieno strategically places the group in her story as a platform for the realisation of a distinct personhood. As a woman, she stands side by side with men to take important decisions for the group and even sometimes she is seen left alone to use her initiative to rescue others or herself in life-threatening conditions.

An example of her role as a decision maker and possibly an initiator is shown at

the meeting where she with others whom she lists as “Oyangi, Peter Ndung’u, Odinga, Arthur Ochwada among others were discussing how our party could create an impact on colonial officials that would accelerate the release of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta” (56). It is actually her suggestion that a day be set aside to commemorate the arrest of Jomo Kenyatta that is adopted by the group. Invariably she centres herself as the originator of the important day in the history of freedom struggles. The group is only included as a background to her ingenuity. The story under “The Desegregation Campaign” shows her as the initiator of the action against segregation in public places. She recalls how she had entered into a restaurant with her cousin to have a bottle of Coke each. Unknown to them, the European woman-owner had called a police and “[W]hen the police arrived, they told John to leave but arrested me and took me to the Kingsway police station. When I was released about two hours later, I organized a successful sit-in. Finally, after three days of sit-ins, and arrest, the woman had to serve us” (61).

At another time, she was involved in the demand for servants of Europeans to bring in their families to live with them in their masters’ houses. She does not just narrate this story, but points out her role as the person to whom these servants complained and the leader of a delegation that fought for this demand to be met. Throughout her narration of freedom fighting, she underlines her role as a central figure in the struggle and as a woman whose stoic character made some of their success stories possible. She is not just interested in narrating the struggle but also she is celebrating her otherness as an individual within the group of “others”. This point calls into question the position of Doris Lessing in her autobiography that “self” is always “an other”. Lessing hopes to contextualize otherness within the conditions of apartheid South Africa and to say that the sufferings and experiences of the individual or “self” are not different from those of “others”. Her assertion is true to the extent that the purpose of “self” is not to

accentuate her otherness but to project it as a feature of the collective. Peel observes that Lessing's autobiography is almost not one because "*Going Home* consists chiefly of political and economic description, which concentrates on others' lives more than an autobiography would" (2). Whereas this peculiarity of Lessing's text is a product of her "unconventional ideas about autobiography" (ibid), Otieno's is a product of her attempt at reconstructing her public image years after the Mau Mau struggles were over. We can infer that both texts are moulded according to authorial intent and invariably otherness is portrayed along these lines otherwise both women's autobiographies would fail to be about "self" if they did not fails to reflect the intent of "self". That is to say, both women redefine autobiography to be not only about the life of the narrator but also about personal influences that have shaped the writing.

Even though Peel credits Lessing's career as a journalist for the pattern in which she has written an "impersonal" autobiography, it is more of Lessing's "life" as a journalist that produced a documentary-like autobiography. On a general note, African autobiography as a tradition may not be able to avoid this documentary approach because of the peculiarity of the experiences of African states. Autobiographies of political figures and activists, male or female, are prone to narrating events in this form since their texts are both documents of "self" and nationalist struggles. Otieno's documentation however, is about "self" and the activities of the "others" as they affect "self". Peel concludes that despite Lessing's preoccupation with "self" as an "other" and her transformation of otherness, *Going Home* is nothing but autobiography since the author is also the protagonist of the narration.

As women, narrating "self" from whatever approach they undertake it, their works are informed by the feminist temperament to interrogate and redefine conventions in favour of the aspirations and needs of women. Peel expatiates:

> In one sense, because feminist theories are sceptical of selfhood, they are more compatible with Lessing's ideas than conventional theories are. While conventional autobiographical theories privilege selfhood, feminist autobiographical theories question it, for feminism in general finds value in otherness… (11).

She explains further that this value lies in the fact that women know how it feels to be the "other" and therefore, they tend to "emphasize respect and reciprocity in dealing with people who in some way are "other" in relation to self" (11). While this is the case sometimes in women's writing, it is not always the case in African women's autobiography especially if the "other" has any relation with colonial powers, patriarchal structures, and systems that stand in one way or the other against the self-actualisation of the narrator-protagonist.

Otieno's autobiography has three pasts: her ancestry, participation in Mau Mau activities, and her marriage to S. M. Otieno and his burial saga. Although the last aspect of the autobiography is more emotionally charged than the other two, all three are her attempts as an individual at "re-righting" history. The final part comprising five chapters is the longest and most personal of all the narrations in the autobiography. Personal because it reveals details of her marriage, relationship with her husband, and her experiences as a woman caught in the web of patriarchy in the late twentieth century Kenya and her husband's short biography.

Marriage has always been a focus of women's writing. The choice of marriage partner, violence against women in marriage, early marriage, the influence of the society and tradition on marriage, are all issues through which African women writers have voiced their viewpoints and engaged male writers' concerns about the same topic. Otieno's marriage comes to focus in her autobiography as a means of dismantling the notion that marriages of public figures are usually dysfunctional. She gives the details of how she met her late husband in her brother's law office. She had just been released

from detention where she had been raped severally by a white colonial interrogator, Rudolph Speed, and was in the process of seeking legal redress when she met her lawyer-husband. The reader is let into the niceties of their courtship, S. M's (as he was popularly called) love for her despite the fact that she had three children from a failed ten-year relationship and one other from the rape. According to her, she tried all she could to discourage him from marrying her but the man persisted. She tries here to give a background to the depth of love and commitment that her late husband had towards her. Ethnic difference was also a possible reason for the relationship not to have developed into marriage. The man being a Luo and herself a Kikuyu were not ordinarily the best of inter-ethnic marriage partners in Kenya at that period. In addition, she cherished her freedom to be an active politician and thought that marriage could be a barrier to her interest in politics. She also had "strong beliefs regarding marriage" and did not want to "be treated as a second-class citizen" (91). She also believed that: "marriage should be a matter of give and take and I was not going to be anybody's slave" (91). These were points she was not willing to compromise but still S.M. crossed the hurdles. It is needful to mention here that in most African cultures, it is more desirable and acceptable for a man to marry a woman who has not had any children.

A woman who is not a widow but has children is regarded as a "prostitute" who should not be brought home by any right thinking man. She is, in Azodo's words, "a woman with a history" who "runs a risk of never finding a husband" (168). This discrimination and societal assessment does not consider the involvement of the man or how this has come to be. The woman is always at the receiving end. It is not surprising then when we see the strong objections put up by S. M's family against his marriage to Otieno. She recalls how her sister-in-law, Helen, had called her a "Kikuyu prostitute" (94), applying a double-edged name to Otieno. For Helen, being a Kikuyu was bad

enough and the fact that she had children from previous relationships was a final straw. Otieno gives examples of many confrontations she had with her husband's family and her husband's disagreement with them. The only exception was her father-in-law, Mzee Jairo Ougo Oyugi, whom she says was close to her.

The death of Wambui's husband marks a turning point in her life and narrative. From this point in the text, she steps into the private-public experience of her husband's burial disputes and close family issues. The section titled "The Burial Saga" is an enterprise in revelation, resistance, and revisiting the injustice experienced by many widows in Africa. SM died of heart failure on December 20, 1986 and his wife, Wambui made preparations to bury him on their farm somewhere on the outskirts of Nairobi. This she wanted to do in accordance with the verbal instructions which she had received from him on his deathbed. However, his relations demanded that he be buried in his hometown and went ahead to institute a court case against Wambui. Their reason being that according to their tradition, a Luo could never be buried in a house which did not qualify to be called one in accordance with this tradition. They argue that a house could only receive the body of a Luo if it had been blessed by the father and since none of the houses built by SM and Wambui had received such blessing; his wife could not bury him in any of them, irrespective of the deathbed wish of the deceased. This case dragged on for over a year until SM's relations were granted by the court to bury him according to their tradition.

It is worth noting that Wambui made history and even rewrote it while she fought a lone fight against her late husband's brother and four hundred members of the Umira Kager clan of Luo. Importantly, as a narrative technique, she becomes the subject of the burial saga as she made it clear that her husband's people did all that they did to spite and kill her fighting spirit. As a confirmation of this, this story is usually quoted by

feminist scholars, historians and activists who have anything to say on tradition and women's invincibility and irrepressiveness in Kenya and Africa at large. Her life story moves beyond local politics to the global and she moves from object position, as the receiver of the injustice, to the subject as the resilient woman who withstood age-long traditions by speaking and acting against them. Her story also uncovers an aspect of Kenyan legal system that perpetrates gender inequality and female oppression. Basu and Mc Grory place Otieno's case within global feminist struggles for justice and cite her effort as an example of the resistance of patriarchy and feminist campaign for positive change of customary laws (1995). They state that:

> This case was illustrative of a society torn between adherence to familiar traditional norms and values and the need to adopt and respond to new values. More important, the case epitomised patriarchal gender-based oppression. The details revealed that in Luo customary law, women were not only denied the right to bury their husbands and other close kin but were also not considered their husbands' closest kin (205).

She narrates her ordeal during this period of her life, pointing out the roles played by many people in the case. She mentions names and passes comments on their actions and statements, for both people who were against her and for her.

In conventional autobiography as observed by Oriaku, the selection of events that are narrated is not done arbitrarily or loosely but rather "it is guided by a sense of propriety as to what is morally right to be revealed or, otherwise suppressed" (7). Otieno's text does not conform to this rule of propriety as she goes on to reveal family "secrets" that would have remained so if not for the opposition she faces from the people concerned. While telling the story of her experience during the litigation brought against her by her husband's family, she divulges deep family issues which her husband had told her while he was alive. She discusses at length the abuse her late husband had suffered as a child at the hands of his stepmother, Magdalena, who also witnessed

against Otieno in court. She recalls stories told her by SM, how she "used to burn Simon and SM's palms with hot *ugali* (maize meal porridge) when they were young in the hope that they would run away from home" (108). Otieno also tells of the trouble her late father-in-law ran into by marrying this woman. She says "because of this marriage, Jairo was excommunicated from his church; later, the church agreed to marry them" (ibid). By going into the details of Magdalena's past, Otieno hopes to gain the reader's support against an "other" that is not qualified to cast aspersions on Otieno's marriage to SM. In addition, since Magdalena is in the opposition, unfavourable portraiture will strengthen the narrator-author's case against the injustice meted out to her.

Throughout her story about Magdalena, Otieno uses contrastive images to describe her relationship with her father-in-law and this woman on the one hand, and her role as an accommodating in-law and Magdalena's hostility as a "mother". As a daughter-in-law, Otieno demonstrates that she performed her duties to her father-in-law, Jairo, and her husband's family. She narrates the role she played during Jairo's illness and after his death, her financial support and activities at this time. She brings up this experience to reinforce the image of the strong self as opposed to the weak others, particularly men. She remembers the scene before the burial of Jairo commenced:

> When I opened the door to SM's private office, the first person I saw was Joash Ochieng'. SM was seated, looking down. Both looked miserable. I did not need to be told what had happened. I concluded that their father was no more. After I had told them how sorry I was, I asked when it happened. SM told me that Mzee had died the day before at four in the afternoon but that he had just been informed. From then on I knew what was ahead of me. I called my brother because I knew that I would get very little assistance from SM and Joash, who were grief-stricken (110).

She ordered for a coffin, arranged for the purchase of flower and "bought whatever was necessary" and "also arranged for money" (111). The reversal of gender roles negates the Western feminist concept of the African woman as a muted and inactive member of

the family and society. Otieno is a good example of the type of women Kolawole calls "[p]ositive role models... closer to the reality of the African woman's positioning" (65). Otieno transgresses gender boundaries and dominates the narration of the burial of Jairo to show her resourcefulness and strength at a time when men's emotions had overwhelmed them.

Otieno divulges family secrets as a resistance to the official versions of stories that the court had accepted as evidence against her. She has not just engaged in the narration for the sake of washing family's dirty linen in public but she needs to also be heard by the public who had listened to her husband's family's stories about her irrelevance in crucial family matters. She explains:

> Under normal circumstances nobody would like to make such family matters public, but I have to, since the evidence adduced in court, and accepted by the judges, showed me as a person who married into a family and did nothing at all, even for an ailing father-in-law (113).

As it obtains in slave narratives where narrators, in an attempt to win the sympathy of the audience, go into details of their lives that could have been left out, in order to win the sympathy of the audience, the authenticity of Otieno's version is to be established through the narration of these details. She writes authoritatively, from her point of view and in accordance with one of the conventions of autobiography, which is to present "the subject's past life from a certain perspective" and invite the reader "to accept his narration of his experiences because they happened to him and he is the sole witness to his revelations" (Oriaku 14). In Otieno's case, her autobiography is a testimony presented to the public as a follow up to the cause she had fought over twelve years before the text was written. Whereas the text of the trial "left out important testimony and concocted statements", her counter-text is to fill official slips and uncover buried testimonies. This is why her references are named, numbered and categorised so that a

clear image of the forces she had contended with, in the past, could be made known.

As a critique of the customs of her husband's ethnic group, Luo, she describes two of their practices through which she strategically hopes to highlight the irrationality and mediocrity of these cultural demands. The first is the process through which a house must pass through before it could be regarded as a home. She says that according to this custom, "the father carries a cock and some fire. At a chosen spot, the father ties up the cock, covers it with a basket, and leaves it there overnight. The next day they return to the spot. If the cock is not there, the site is considered unsuitable and an alternative spot must be sought" (188). While the man does this, the man's wife is completely shut out. She also describes the *ter* and *teroburo* practices in which a widow is inherited by her husband's brother or cousin:

> In some places in Ugenya District, one way to *ter* (inherit) a widow is for the inheritor to have sexual relations with her. Otherwise, the Luo believe the children will die. Sometimes they hire someone to perform ter. The inheritance is not complete unless the widow's eldest son and his wife witness the act... If a woman rejects ter and dies, the ter is performed on her dead body before she is buried. In a story that appeared in a 1987 issue of Drum magazine, one Luo man actually boasted that he had done this (189).

Some issues are raised by this narration. Otieno underscores the cultural diversities of African societies to tell about a custom that is practised in Kenya but is not common to all ethnic groups, at least not her Gikuyu ethnic group. Ethnicity continues to manifest as a strong presence in African socio-political sphere and literature, one reason why Okunoye in his paper, "The Critical Reception of African Poetry" (2004) argues for an ethnic reading of African poetry. Writers include their ethnic values in their works for various reasons, one of which may be to show their influence on the works they have produced. Though the praise of ethnic cultural practices and beliefs is not as visible as what is observed in African men's autobiography, for instance Soyinka's *Ake*, Otieno focuses on them in her text in order to build an argument for how she is later to

dissociate "self" from the custom into which she has married. She subtly draws a parallel between the "house rule" that was used against her in court and the ter practice. She comments on the *ter*: "if this is not repugnant to justice and morality, then I am at a loss" (189). By implication, Luo customs are not as sacred or moral as her husband's family and clan claim.

The third year after the burial of her husband, Otieno decides to launch "the S.M. Otieno's clan" (207). In Kenyan cultures as in many other African cultures, a clan is constituted by extended family members who believe that they share same ancestry (Sobania 137). Within this setting, members agree to help one another, socialise as a group and can be represented by anyone of them as they deem fit. Sobania states that "[a]s clan members, all these people are each other's relatives to whom they have certain social obligations" and it is often said that "a clan never breaks even though people might separate" (137). Otieno's act then can be seen as a deviation to kinship ties. She demonstrates the extent to which she wishes to go in order to redefine her relationship with her husband's family and also their connection to her children. She explains that the institution of S.M. Otieno's clan "marks the end of the relationship between my family and the Umira Kager clan, to whom I wrote a letter to inform them of our decision" (208), a decision she claims was the wish of her late husband. She goes further:

> I also returned my husband's certificate of membership in the clan. Since then, I have felt as if a burden was lifted from my shoulders because I have managed to fulfil all my husband's wishes, regardless of the cost. We later signed an affidavit surrendering SM's share of his father's land to the children of the late Simon Odhiambo, SM's older brother. For us, this ended the whole issue (208).

The finality of her decision is confirmed by the legal documents with which she backs up the break from her husband's clan. Her autobiography also serves as a document that is used to make the decision a permanent one.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Otieno's resistance is not just in words, but in action and it extends to uprooting deep-rooted beliefs and customs, just like Saadawi whose activism and resistance have posed a threat to her life and eventually lead her to exile in 1991. In her text, Saadawi traces her interest in activism to her father's unrelenting effort at fighting against British occupation of Egypt and against local collaborators. After narrating the circumstance of her birth and other familial set-ups, she opens the eighth chapter, "My Revolutionary Father" with memories of the role her father played in the revolution of 1919 in Egypt. According to her, he had joined with his fellow students to march on the streets of Cairo in protest against the British and was hit in the foot by a bullet. His bravery won him the heart of villagers who considered him a hero who was ready to risk his life in order to see his people freed from colonialism. In line with Saadawi's feminist temperament, she locates the root of her father's bravery in the stories his grandmother, "the woman from Gaza", had told him. In continuation of the matrilineal courage and vision, his mother also joined other women in the struggle against colonial authorities.

El Saadawi points out that her paternal grandmother was only two years old when the British invaded Egypt and as a kind of culture at that time, women composed songs to decry the invasion and express their protest. Her grandmother was such a respected revolutionary who became a rallying point for other women and men during the fight against colonialism and they were all "ready to fight the invader to the death, for was not their life no more than a living death?!" (68). This point reiterates the position of African feminists who insist that African women have been visible long before feminism and that radical feminism, which shuts out men and is against men, is not for African women. Colonialism has been a site for cooperative and complementary relations among men and women whose primary interest has been to liberate the

continent from the clutches of colonial powers.

Kolawole appropriately contextualises African women's struggle and underscores the "need to continue unfolding areas of visibility and power of African women especially in the traditional context" (26). Saadawi, like Kolawole, uses the grandmother's example to show that women without Western education in pre-colonial and colonial Africa were politically conscious and active, as against the notion of Western feminists that African women need their help to speak and become visible. It is not only in this instance that Saadawi portrays the strength of foremothers in her autobiography. For the purpose of delineating a vocal and irrepressible self, she enunciates maternal life stories of bravery and brings in more contemporary experience through the narration of her father's revolutionary consciousness, a trait she has inherited from him.

Autobiography criticism recognises memory as a vital medium of narrating life stories. In the process of recollecting past events, the autobiographer is at liberty to give her interpretation of this past in a manner that will eventually reveal her level of creativity and enhance the production of a readable, enjoyable and highly descriptive and revealing life story. In view of Saadawi's stature as a renowned writer of fictional and non-fictional works, it is not surprising that her autobiography is so pungent with literariness that it reads like a fictional writing which only resembles real and actual lives. Some critics of autobiography have opined that fictionality in autobiography is a demonstration of skill, a display of rich imagination and not necessarily a disadvantage or fault in writing (Oriaku; Elnaggar). Chapter titles such as "Uncles, Suitors and Other Bloodsuckers", "Mad Aunts and Abandoned Babies", "Love and The Hideous Cats" read and sound like titles of Arabic stories, like "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves". These titles most often do not reveal the subject of the autobiography. In other words, they

seem impersonal and are inventions of the writer rather than titles that point to the aspect or period of her life which she is about to narrate. Only two chapter titles are personal, "My Revolutionary Father" and "A Stove for My Mother", which are tributes to the positive influence that her parents have had on her life and philosophy.

However, despite the seeming lack of detachment from the chapter titles, what goes on in these chapters is nothing short of subjective narration. She merely hides under the third person point of view in the titles to give an overall image of many aspects of her family, their religion, and even her country's political life. She also uses the third person point of view to explore sensitive and controversial issues under a cover. The title of the third chapter is "God Above, Husband Below", a feminist critique of husband-wife relations and the invocation of the divine figure to perpetrate violence against women. She actually narrates the stories her grandmother had told her about her (the grandmother's) wedding night when a woman assigned the responsibility of breaking the girl-child's hymen had just finished her task and the bleeding girl is carried on a she-ass to her groom's house. She continues the narration:

> In the bridegroom's house she lay on a mat... The bridegroom called out in a loud, rough voice: 'Get up girl and prepare supper.' She was slow in getting up, so the blows of his long thin cane rained on her, the same cane with which he used to guide his donkey... This was the custom in the village. Every husband had to beat his bride on the wedding night before he did anything else... so that she would know that Allah was above, and her husband below (31).

People about whom she has no positive impression are usually presented in humorous passages. Her uncles and aunts fall under this category. One of them that really stands out is her paternal uncle, who is well educated but opposes educating the girl-child. Saadawi does not spare words and employs grotesque imagery in depicting him. She narrates an instance in which he paid a visit to their home after her admission into the School of Medicine. He refused to call her by name and said that "'Girls

rubbing shoulders with boys in the university is dangerous for the girls' " (255). Saadawi describes him as overweight, possessing legs that are too thin for the structure he had in his upper part. Whenever he attempted to use his cane on her and her brother, the man would fall. She says,

> When he collapsed back on the sofa we could hear the sound of air blowing in and out of his mouth and nose. Sometimes it blew out of his backside too, for his second wife never stopped feeding him with lamb's feet..., and every time he went to the toilet my brother would block his ears with his fingers, and burst into endless peals of laughter (256).

The reader is invited to share in this laughter and assess the position of her uncle on girls' education.

It is clear from her choice of narrative strategy that she has not engaged in autobiography writing because of any "selfish" reason to perpetuate one's memory or to put into writing the things that stand the risk of going into the recession of memory. In the opening pages of her text, she does self-examination in order to make clear her purpose of writing:

> Why am I writing this autobiography? Is it a longing for my past life? Is my life over, or is there something of it left? Are words the last resort when one wants to hold on to what has passed by in life before it is gone forever? To fix images in one's memory before they vanish and can no longer be replaced? To struggle against death, to exist now, or even forever? (15).

Ordinarily, if considered in line with conventions of traditional autobiography, the questions she poses above are valid reasons for venturing into autobiography. Roland Barthes wrote his autobiography because he believed the author was dead and the sole aim of St. Augustine's *Confessions* was to reveal the struggle against spiritual death by a lone figure. More valid reasons for her autobiographical enterprise can be found in the answers to the following questions that she asks as a continuation of this self-examination:

> Am I trying to discover what is buried deep down inside me, to reveal what is hidden through the fear of God, the father, the husband, the teacher, the male or female friend or colleague, through the fear of the nation to which we belong, or those we love? (15).

She tries to understand herself in the light of the writing project. Her worries are those things that are hidden which she seeks to uncover, bring to the public as a testimony to her commitment to her concept of the writer. She needs to reveal these things because by doing this, she rediscovers her subjecthood and inscribes her otherness as opposed to the list of "others" she gives in the statement above; "God, the father, the husband, the teacher, the male or female colleague, the nation". The fear of this group silences an "other", which is exactly what she stands to resist. In an interview with Adele S. Newton-Horst, El Saadawi makes this point clearer:

> If I don't tell the truth, I don't deserve to be called a writer. Sometimes I am tired, but I cannot change myself, since childhood, I have had to defend my position… I became a feminist when I was a child and started to ask questions…to become aware that women are oppressed and feel discrimination.

For the truth to be made known, no secrets will be spared and this is why she digs into family history to highlight the contexts within which her identity is formed. Being a feminist from childhood requires some form of rebellion and disobedience since what she stands against are those things that she is required to do in order to fit into the female stereotype. To be afraid is to keep quiet and to be truthful is to be vocal and the two sides are oppositional in El Saadawi's construct of the silencing "other" and the writing or speaking subject. El Saadawi's text reveals the various backgrounds in the average African woman's life against which she writes and narrates "self". She acquires a new identity each time she is confronted with issues that seek to define her outside the concept of "self" which she possesses. As a child-assessor of her aunt, she constructs "self" both as an "other" of another female and as an "other" of the society in which they are both the "other" of men. As a writer cum activist, she revisits religious issues that are

inimical to the realisation of a free and fair society and portrays the role of Western education and the politics of Egypt on her "self" as an "other" of both systems.

Autobiography or self-life-narrating is a medium for the narrator - who is also the author and protagonist - to narrate his/her life stories, choosing events, people and places to project his/her central concern. These choices highlight the difference between the identity of the narrator and "other" people - of different class, gender, race and even ideology, showing the narrator as a unique self whose life is worth narrating and reading. However, for African women, as stated by Kolawole and Alabi, their stories are not those of individuals *per se* but representations of their communities and larger women's collective experience. It follows then that an African woman's autobiography may characteristically explore experiences that are personal and at the same time common to women of probably her age, ethnic group, religious persuasions, social conditions and marital circumstances. In the light of this argument, Nawal El Sadaawi, Wambui Otieno, and Tendayi Westerhof are voices for others representing "self" and "other" with either present in the other.

Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*, is a story of an HIV positive woman who decides to tell her life story in the hope that "someone out there might be changed" (1). She writes under a different circumstance from Saadawi and Otieno and is a much younger woman than both of them. Though she does not mention her precise age in the text, an estimate from the stories she narrates will put her in her mid thirties. Her otherness is characterised by the disease and is different from the types of otherness experienced by Saadawi as an outspoken and rebellious daughter and Otieno as a woman Mau Mau fighter who is opposed by colonial powers and later by her husband's family. Westerhof is a member of a group in the category of homosexuals, sex workers and drug dealers who are not so well received in African societies. Therefore, she would need to justify

her writing effort and make her autobiography a text that is worth reading. Her intention is previewed in the "Foreword" in which we are introduced to the text and its writer. The foreword is written by Obatunde Oladapo, who is described as the Executive Director, Positive Life Association of Nigeria. He recommends the text to young women, women living with HIV and even men. He asserts that:

> *Unlucky in Love* chronicles the adult life of the African woman in search of the dream man and the dream family. The book is the story of the African woman…it vividly depicts the reality of the strength and vulnerability of the African woman. (xi).

He mentions the acronym "HIV" and the words "woman" and "society" in almost all the paragraphs as a way of drawing the reader's attention to the importance of the role these words are to play in the narration. In whatever way the title must have suggested a romantic love story, his introduction clearly corrects such an impression and braces up the reader for the seriousness and importance of this text. Westerhof's autobiography is a kind of manual and not an ordinary chronicle of a woman's life. Also, she is "the African woman" and not "an African woman" because the narrative that the reader is about to encounter represents the voice of many others. Olatunde explains the role of the society in the life of the author-narrator and hopes that by reading this autobiography, the target audience might be in a better position to relate with the society and the demands it makes on women, especially single women.

The text has eight chapters, each dealing with episodes in her life that are relevant to the purpose or objective of the text. Structurally, Westerhof's autobiography is unlike that of Saadawi who writes a chronological account of her childhood, teenage years, and part of adulthood. She concentrates on her adult life, emphasising the series of events that lead to her present state. Though her personal experience dominates the narration, this experience is better understood when put into the perspectives of familial

and societal experiences. These refer to the impact of her familial background and the socio-cultural mores, which guided or misguided her into making the choices she made and thereby acquired the HIV/AIDS status. Her narrative is a specialised writing because it overlaps with health and life-threatening condition. *Unlucky in Love* is read in this section as a tool that serves to reveal cultural inequalities, speak against the stigmatisation of people living with HIV/AIDS, and to expose its impact on the woman, and resist the "sick role theory". This theory refers to the prescribed behaviour and cooperation required by sick people in Western societies. According to its tenets, sick people are to depend entirely on medical expertise in the hope that the sickness will terminate and life can return to normalcy.

On the contrary, HIV/AIDS is not a temporary health condition and requires a different set of strategies of coping from temporary illness in the sick theory. Therefore, HIV/AIDS narratives like Westerhof's, subvert this theory by narrating personal experiences and inadequacy of medicare for people living with AIDS (PLWAs). She highlights the importance of societal support and understanding for this set of people in African societies that claim to be communal but isolate anyone that has contracted the disease. Her autobiography is a counter-discourse that empowers the disempowered "self" through active and public intervention in dominant narrative of stigmatisation. By becoming the "subject" of her narrative, she dismantles the "othering" of PWAs and creates a version that breaks the dominant process. This she does through a conscious strategic arrangement of her lived experiences to conform to her project of reordering her condition as the stigmatised "other". This strategy is critically examined in the following paragraphs in the larger framework of contemporary African women's autobiography.

If migration is one of the stories of our time as rightly stated by Gurnah (2004),

HIV/AIDS is definitely another one of those stories. Westerhof claims that "there is no single family in my country (Zimbabwe) that has not been affected by HIV and had a family member who has either died from it or who is suffering from AIDS" (12). Despite the prevalence of this disease in Africa, it is not common to come across autobiographies of people living with it. Westerhof's work is in this regard a pioneer work written by a public figure on the subject (vii). Being a public figure like Saadawi and Otieno, she has always been in focus and there is an image of her that has been projected in the media. Moreover, as a person living with HIV/AIDS, she is motivated by a desire to disconnect "self" from the socially and "historically imposed image of the self" and create "an alternate self in the autobiographical act" (Friedman 41). Her gender separates her work from men's autobiography because she, like other women, does not experience alienation from her past self merely as a result of the act of writing as male theorists of autobiography claim, but experiences it as a way of resisting the externally imposed image of her as a woman and as a person living with the disease. She consciously alienates herself even in the present from the structures that inhibit her self-actualisation and expression.

Therefore, stronger than what obtains in Saadawi and Otieno's texts is the awareness that her work needs to address itself to the positive side of her life and present the causes of the negative aspects, thereby inviting the reader to sympathise with and accept her identity. She portrays "self" as the object of male "other", she is loving, persevering, faithful and naïve, whereas all the men she has ever loved are dupes, cheats, Casanovas, and the verbally abusive. It is through this image that she sets out to disabuse the mind of the reader about the dominant narrative of portraying People Living With AIDS (PLWAs) as morally bankrupt. She keeps clearing herself:

I can hear you thinking, 'ah ah, promiscuous…' but that is not true at all. I can

> count the number of sexual partners I have had on the fingers of one hand - and three of them have been the fathers of my children. I have never been one to hop into bed with a man too quickly, not at all, though I wish I could say the same for my partners. The only men I have slept with are men I would have happily spent the rest of my life with, it was just that they did not feel the same way about me. (2)

In a study conducted by Wendy Watson and Nancy J. Bell to establish the reasons why women between the ages of 35 and 50 in USA are more prone to contracting HIV/AIDS than young adults and adolescents, a respondent observes that one of the problems with this group of women is that they tend to believe that every man they meet could turn out to be the "Mr Right". The essayists quote one respondent: "...we're still very romantic. We still want 'Mr Right'. We want it to be perfect. We want to fall in love and the works. And I think even if you had it once and it's not worked out, you still want it a second time" (317). In line with this discourse, Westerhof's search for "Mr Right" led her into successive failed relationships.

In the first chapter "My Dream Man" she describes Horst, her husband as her dream man with good looks and in good financial and social standing in Harare, Zimbabwe. Even though he was about thirty years older than her, she tells of how much love she showered on Horst and at first it seemed their relationship was going to work. She also recalls her love and commitment to Emmanuel and Joe; the men who fathered her three children, and how unloving these men were. Horst would buy her the most expensive gifts and take her out to meet the high and mighty of the Harare society. Two issues arise from this part of the first chapter. She tactically builds up the character of Horst using positive imagery in order to underline her objectivity in a highly subjective narrative. Horst is not all about the bad, he could also be good and loving. Second, she quickly introduces the HIV theme by narrating the event that led to her having to undergo the test. Her husband, Horst, had got a job in Dubai as a trainer and was asked to go for complete medical check up before he could start. Without his consent, they ran

an HIV/AIDS test on him and found him positive. He came back to Harare and blamed his “African wife”, Tendayi, for the infection. From this point, her life, marriage to Horst, and the autobiography all take a new turn. Her life becomes very miserable, her home turned into a permanent arena for fights, and the narrative becomes more emotionally charged as she attempts to evoke the sympathy of the reader. In addition, she does not fail to highlight the role of the society in single women’s quest for the ideal woman’s life.

Since she is on a mission to create an “alternate self” and disabuse the minds of the public about PLWAs, she needs to show clearly that she has not been responsible for her condition. In the analysis of the public reception of people living with HIV/AIDS, unlike in the case of other terminal diseases, where people sympathise with victims and support them, PWAs are cut off from the hope of being supported by the society. This is because HIV/AIDS is believed to be ‘self-inflicted’, and that the individual deserves the just treatment handed down by the disease and the society. Therefore, in order to reverse this narrative, Tendayi has to highlight her condition as the writing subject who has been the object of men’s misdemeanours.

Before she became infected, marriage was about the most important thing to her. This is because as she states, single women are not only labelled as being loose but also may not be able to attain certain positions because of their marital status. She becomes driven by the quest for an ideal man and ideal marriage which will conform to societal prescriptions. Interestingly, Tendayi calls herself a “fighter” because she will not keep quiet and watch while she or another is being unjustly treated. But she only becomes a fighter after her life has been invaded by series of emotional and marital catastrophes. This motif of “fighting” underlines her assessment of the society and her quest for an ideal man who will give her the material comfort she missed as a child and fulfil her

hope for a happy married life. As a fighter, she engages unloving men on one level of otherness, the disease from which she has had to reconstitute her identity on another level of otherness, and lastly the society that discriminates against single women and PLWAs.

Unlucky in Love is an autobiography that repositions the female subject as the "other" of a discriminating society. By society we mean men and women who make it their duty to pressurise the single woman into looking for a man to marry at all cost. Although she later realises that she should not have succumbed to these pressures but then it was too late for her because the dreaded disease had caught up with her. The society becomes a reference point for the constitution of the new identity she has as a woman who has tested positive to HIV. Her life story shows that she is someone who cares about the image she portrays in the public and will not spare any expense to look good and make her acceptable by the society. Her ideology is further complicated by the HIV identity that ties her to the society. According to N.L. Roth and M. S. Nelson:

> Entering the realm of HIV-positive personhood is not a singular entrance. The entrance is effected not only in relationship to the physician, but in relationship to the others in the community and understanding community norms. (11).

In other words, this identity is not an isolated one but tied to "others", as a matter of necessity, because it borders on survival.. How she is received by the society becomes very important to her if she is to maintain a positive attitude to her condition, which has implications for her future if she does not want it to slip out of her fingers. Unfortunately for her, she had never really been on the good side of the society, so when she became infected, it was a continuation of the battle she had fought as a single mother before she married Horst. She blames her decision to marry him, a white man who was about thirty years older, on societal assessment of single parenting and cultural practice that subordinates the woman to the man:

> In less than three months he had persuaded me that we should be married. It was not difficult. My three children loved him already – almost as much as I did - and I badly wanted to be a wife. In my culture I often think women are denied real identity. When a Shona woman marries, she takes on her husband's name - just like European tradition, but when she has a child, she immediately loses even her own first name…my life as a single mother was always an uphill struggle, not just in terms of financing my children's upbringing, but in being accepted by the society I was part of. I longed for the respectability that being Mrs Somebody would bring… (4).

So, all along she has been "seeing" herself in the "mirror" of the "other", the society and she has struggled to keep up with this image in order to avoid being isolated. Overall, her autobiography is an attempt to continue to be part of the society that has ironically contributed to her status. But as an African woman, she loses whatever image of "self" she has constructed if she is not accepted by the society, since her womanhood depends on the "other", that is the society. Her text demonstrates the validity of Cosslet, Summerfield, and Lury's assertion about the woman's subjectivity:

> … [T]hat the narration of a life or a self can never be confined to a single, isolated subjecthood. Others are an integral part of consciousness, events and the production of a narrative. Or, put more abstractly, the narration of a self cannot be understood in isolation from an other it acknowledges, implicitly or explicitly, and with which it is in a constitutive relationship. Moreover, this other may be either a concrete individual or a generalised subject (4).

From Westerhof's perception, being isolated from the society will interfere with the image of the ideal woman which she has over the years struggled to measure up to. The isolation or individualism that is seen in her is not the same as what obtains in Western autobiography because it is her status that has enforced it on her. She, therefore, does not really celebrate individualism but only uses it as a platform to textualise her desire for integration into the ideal womanhood and the larger society. This could be one of the reasons why her attitude to other women throughout the narrative seems to be distant, apart from Jean, the Christian lady; she does not have any other friend. This constitutes a negation of the female-bonding concept in feminist criticism. She does not agree with

them because their presence usually threatens the already unstable marriage with Horst. In this list of the "other" women are those married women from her extended family who would not take her in when she was abandoned by her second partner, the women her husband was having extra-marital affairs with, nosy neighbours who wanted to confirm that she was HIV positive and every woman who conceals the truth of their status. The list seems endless but the boundary she erects between "self" and the "other" woman is visible and well defined in the narrative.

Boundaries have been largely created by patriarchy in African societies through a series of oppressive and silencing structures and perpetuated by men's writing. However, like Saadawi and Otieno, Westerhof crosses the "private" boundary by engaging in writing her autobiography and resists silence by being vocal on issues that are usually effaced or ignored in African literature. Writing about one's intimate love life and worse still, one's sexual relationship, is not a popular theme in African literature, particularly for non-fictional genres like autobiography. The image of the 'wayward" woman most likely will trail the female writer who ventures into this taboo arena. Westerhof has been brought up by her father, like most women, to believe that "girls should be seen and not heard" (47), so that the disclosure of her sexual life transgresses this "seen and not heard" boundary. She tries to understand her present state and recover the hope and excitement that brought her into marriage by breaking through the confines of patriarchal culture through the narration of some private moments of her life. Friedman opines that this is necessary for oppressed groups, which include women, because it is by breaking these confines that members of such groups can be heard and seen in history:

> In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles it and, at the same time project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the

> oppressor it has to become visible to itself. All revolutionary movements create their own ways of seeing (40).

Westerhof does not stop at breaking the confines of silence by narrating self according to her own terms; she also creates her own way of seeing her otherness as a single mother and also a woman living with HIV.

This chapter has examined non-fictional autobiographies of three African women from different socio-political realities and shown the different ways in which they all project their otherness through narratives that underline their vocality and resistance as women. The externally imposed image of the "African woman" is often deconstructed to allow for an internally generated one within the autobiographical act. Gender becomes an overarching factor that determines the theme and aesthetic employed by Saadawi, Otieno, and Westerhof in narrating personal, familial, and national histories. They negotiate self and other according to specific centres which they create through the narration of their life stories. They also demonstrate that African women autobiographers are operating in a "closed", dogmatic terrain called "public" where their "Africaness" and womanhood are queried if they transgress the rules that guard their expression.Therefore, as touching issues that are personal, political, and religious, they are not to be "speaking subjects".

The discussions done in this chapter show that unlike the argument put forward by Carolyn Heilbrun that Western women's autobiographies depict "intuitive, nurturing, passive, but never – in spite of the contrary evidence of their accomplishments – managerial" selves, African women's autobiographies portray active and managerial selves (24). They push for their inclusion in familial, societal, and national spheres by narrating their accomplishments in the face of stiff oppositions. They even divulge personal issues and family "secrets" to show that they are not only vocal but also resist existing and contemporary images of African women.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEMALE BONDING AND REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD AS MARKERS OF OTHERNESS

5.0 Introduction

African women's literary productions have received a fair share of critical attention in the past three decades. Their voices have been identified by theorists to postulate various positions in literature, to refute claims of universalism, and to unsettle male hegemonic works. The voice through whom the female writer speaks provides a viable insight into other constituents of her work. Women, as subjects of their works, have turned and mingled private concerns with the public. Here, issues such as "jobs, politics, business" that are named public "[a]ccording to masculinist agreement" are approached from the private eye of the woman whose concerns are expected to be about love, family, the rearing of children" (Sengupta 561).

The private "eye" speaks testifies to the possibilities which the female gender might facilitate in the public domain of literature. The value placed on the testimony of the woman through the lenses of the "I" by feminist criticism accentuates the difference between male authored texts and female authored ones in African literature. While the male writer might take the "I" for granted by subsuming it in the third person omniscient perspective, the female writer continues to find the first person subjective case as a means of taking control of the narrative and imprinting her femaleness in literature. As mentioned in Chapter Four, women's entrance into African literature was facilitated by narratives of the "I", in which lived experiences of the author are closely connected to those of the narrator-protagonist and other women who are foregrounded in the narratives. Invariably, women form a community outside the texts as writers, since they write from a position of commanality as women, and they also make their characters

form another community within the text as a textual population that are brought to the centre from the margins of male narratives.

According to Kolawole, one of the reasons why African women's writing is akin to individual or collective experiences is because African women conceive writing "not as a synonym for elusive fiction but a source of self-actualization" (167). She goes further:

> These women writers do not conceal their active relationship to the fiction. This self-referential process is therapeutic, as it allows direct self-commentary by unveiling temporarily the veil of fiction. This authenticates the African woman's reality that is being depicted and validates any emergent theoretical position. This is central to the process of self definition and self-healing... Whereas western women writers can afford the luxury of fiction qua fiction, African women often have an urgent message and this precludes self-effacement (167-8).

In other words, African women writers' contributions to literature differ from men's because they deal with the "social and historical realities of African women's lives" (Davies "Introduction", 6). Among the concerns that communicate women's realities according to Carole Boyce Davies are,

> 1) Motherhood (the presence or absence of it/its joys and pains); 2) the vagaries of living in a polygamous marriage; 3) the oppression of colonialism and white rule; 4) the struggle for economic independence; 5) the achievement of a balance between relationships with men and friendships with other women; 6) the fickleness of husbands; 6) [sic] the importance of having a support system, particularly in the urban environment; 7) the mother-daughter conflict or relationship; 8) the mother-son relationship; 9) above all, the definition of self or the development of a separate self over and beyond, but not separate from, tradition or other "man-made" restrictions (16).

Motherhood tops the list followed by marriage while colonialism comes third. Davies' thematic listing is most likely drawn from the reading of women's writing from its inception in the sixties to the mid-nineteen eighties when her book was published. Flora Nwapa, the name that usually tops the list of early and pioneer women authors, concentrated on projecting female experience through the fictionalisation of the most

obvious and available theme at that time. This aspect of women's experience was either not given adequate attention or was misrepresented in male-authored texts. Achebe's women in *Things Fall Apart* are merely a sub-set of character population which answered "yes" to domineering male figure, or are simply voiceless. The best he offers them comes in the marginal functions that he assigns them as mothers, farmers, storytellers, and the embodiment of African beauty. Though Raisa Simola praises this as an improvement upon the image of women in colonialist literature, most feminist critics do not commend him for minimising female capabilities. Therefore, Nwapa's portraiture of motherhood in her texts captures areas which might have escaped the mind of male writers.

It is not accidental that motherhood almost always finds a space in African literature, it is rather a recognition of the fact that in most cultures in Africa, "motherhood defines womanhood" (Davies 243). If after reaching a marriageable age and a woman, for whatever reasons, fails to get married and bear children, her biological and social status as a woman is questioned. She acquires titles and names that are not only abusive but derogatory simply because it is thought that her life is equal to motherhood and the absence of a child nullifies her life. In her essay, "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu", Davies explores the difference between the representation of motherhood by authors from the same culture but different genders and submits:

> The women writers deal with the conflicts of motherhood. Rather than presenting an idealized view of motherhood, they present both its joys and pains, the details of the woman's experiences of motherhood. The male writers present womanhood and motherhood but within the context of the larger societal problems. In all the novels in this study, there is no single view of motherhood. Various types of mothers are projected. One point is clear, however, motherhood is crucial to the happiness of the woman and to her ability to control her life. From a Western perspective, this is seemingly a contradictory anti-feminist argument. But if we understand Steady's definition of African feminism and the

centrality of children, it is not (244-5).

Davies's observation about the various types of motherhood that are represented in African literature correlates with the main argument of this chapter; that fictional autobiographies authored by African women approach motherhood from different perspectives. These perspectives can be linked with the locations of their authors politically, socio-culturally and geographically. Their locations determine to a large extent their concerns and projection of motherhood. In subsequent paragraphs, these concerns including the construction of the otherness of female subjects as grandmothers, mothers, and daughters in Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall be Tanga*, and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* will be discussed. Characterization and the bonding or merging of "selves" as a way of defining self and otherness in these texts are also explored.

Generally, fiction can be considered autobiographical if it bears direct relations to the life of the author while a text is classified as fictional autobiography if it is an imaginative life-story or lives stories of characters done in the first person pronoun. The key to understanding the concept of fictional autobiography lies in recognising the fluidity between real life experiences and those contained in fictional works. Tsaaior in his monograph *Fact of Fiction, Fiction of Fact*, argues that both fiction and fact are sides of a coin in which "none is totalitarian, unmerged or self-sufficient in one narrative text" (3). His position coincides with the assertions of Kolawole and Davies that there are deliberate and visible commonalities between African women's lived experiences and their fictional works. Kolawole cites the works of Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, and Nawal El Saadawi as examples that bear these resemblances (ibid, 168). The difference between African women's fiction and Western women's is that the former's history somewhat compels them to engage in fictionalising reality not for the sake of it

but for more pungent ideological and political reasons.

It is this point of departure, of writing fiction for ideological reasons, that is crucial in reading African women's fictional autobiographical works. Therefore, apart from centring the lives of their female protagonists, Beyala's *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is a bold critique of the socio-economic decadence in an African state, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* navigates the socio-political terrain of Nigeria from the late nineteen sixties to nineteen nineties while Magona critically chronicles the lived experiences of black people in apartheid South Africa in *Mother to Mother*. Their choice of the autobiographical voice serves the purpose of authenticating each writer's fiction as the characters speak as insiders and stakeholders in the discourse that underline their otherness and those of other characters from disparate positions.

5.1 Analysis of Texts

These three women writers occupy notable positions in African literature. They are, in different ways, literary mouthpieces for men and women of their societies. Beyala is a well known, prolific Francophone migrant author of radical and sometimes controversial works, who has to her credit at least thirteen novels all written in French and published by prominent publishing houses such as Heinemann ad Editions J'ai Lu (Hitchcott 2). *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is one of her first two novels, one of the three whose translations are available in English and is acclaimed for its non-conformity to the traditional image of women in African literature. For example, Nathaniel Etoke reads Mariama Barry's, Ken Bugul's, and Beyala's texts as a proof of the existence of lesbian or homosexual narratives in African literature. He opines that Beyala and these two Francophone women writers tactically write about same-sex relationship through narrative techniques that "alternate, combine, or contradict heterosexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality". Though he does not admit that more urgent and serious issues than

homosexuality are raised in the novel, he does agree that in African women's writing such as Beyala's and her colleagues', bi or homosexuality is only brushed and not centred. It then follows that if it is a marginal topic, other matters must have taken the centre space. This is one of the reasons why Darlington's assessment of the text in "Calixthe Beyala's Manifesto and Fictional Theory" as a manifesto is very appropriate. In her words:

> Instead, *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is in part a manifesto. On one level, it is a political manifesto drawing attention to the civil rights of children. On another level, it is a political manifesto for the rights of women: socially and economically. A significant part of the argument lies in a fight against free market capitalism which undermines the value of girl-children and women through the demand for their bodies. (41)

By Darlington's analysis, Beyala's position as a postcolonial writer calls for a more relevant narrative than one that claims that her works serve unpopular and possibly selfish individual purpose. Even though Beyala has been integrated into the mainstream French literary circle, the fact of her Africanness continues to surface in her writing. As rightly observed by Hitchcott, "[f]or the French reader, Beyala represents both (Parisan) self and (African) other" (16). She retains her African roots, which mark her as an "other", by giving them free expression in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga.*

Your Name Shall be Tanga is the story of Tanga, a seventeen-year old girl from a French-speaking African country. She is incarcerated with a forty-year old French lady in prison. The story opens with the impending death of the sick young girl who feels she needs to perpetuate her life by telling her life story to her fellow inmate. But before she can do that, both of them will have to merge into one so that words will not be spoken but the white woman will know the story from intuition, by becoming Tanga. This they achieve by lying down beside each other and holding each other's hands. Tanga is born into a poor family of two daughters, an uncaring mother and an incestuous father who

finds pleasure in other women's arms rather than his wife's. Tanga digs deep into her childhood in order to reveal the cause of her miserable life and imprisonment. Being born into a community where children are forced into child-labour as early as eight years old, Tanga too is expected to work and feed her family at a tender age. Her father impregnates her at the age of twelve and connives with her mother to murder the child. Soon after, her father dies leaving her to fend for the family.

Owing to the general decadence in the community in which they live, her mother has no qualms sending her out to engage in prostitution at this early age. She goes from street to street selling her body and bringing back the gains of the sales to her greedy mother who never works but wants to enjoy the good things of life. One day, while roaming the streets for patrons, Tanga meets Hassan and falls in love with him. At first, she does it for the money but later dreams of a future with Hassan as the father of her children. However, Hassan is not in the least interested in marrying her and in fact discourages her from dreaming about marriage with any man, because as far as he is concerned, marriage kills the woman's beauty and usefulness to men like him, who want their women's body unsoiled by childbirth. Tanga's dream keeps her off the street much to her mother's displeasure who knows that her source of livelihood is Tanga. They both engage in bouts of fight and each time Tanga makes it clear that she is never going to return to prostitution. While this fight goes on, Tanga seeks for solace in Mala, a crippled child, who she wants to adopt. For Tanga, Mala is the refuge to whom she can run and also an object of love on which she can shower the affection she never gets from her mother. Meanwhile, her mother finds a replacement for her in her younger sister who is barely twelve years old. She also hatches a plan to expel Tanga from their home by falsely accusing Tanga of stealing her briefs. Tanga is beaten by a mob and is forced to find shelter in the street. On the third night of her flight, Tanga meets "Lame-Leg" a

disabled man who offers her love and shelter. She follows him to his home, which also happens to house derelict children whom he uses to make money and form an empire where he is the ruler. Tanga becomes his mistress for a few days and bolts when she discovers that the man wants her to bear children for him. She runs back to her home and decides to find Mala, her adopted son. Unfortunately, while she is away, Mala contacts an infection and is at the point of death. She carries him on her back in search of medical care. Since she has no money of her own, she is unable to afford any treatment and eventually lands in the midst of currency forgers from whom she hopes to raise some money. No sooner she joins them than she gets arrested and jailed. It is in this jail that she meets Anna-Claude, a former teacher of philosophy who asks to be transferred to Africa in search of an imaginary lover called Ousmane. She had lost her teaching job because she has become obsessed with this search and scares her students away with her strange talk and looks. The commissioner eventually orders her arrest and she is put in prison for being a public nuisance.

Beyala's craft in *Your Name Shall be Tanga* is directed towards exploring the connections between two seemingly unrelated stories to underscore the tragedy of being a girl-child in an oppressive and debased society. This section examines Beyala's concept of "self" and "other" as a function of the complex relationship between memory, the present, and the future. The narration is permeated by a dense atmosphere of death, loss, depravity and abuse. The sense of flow of the experiences of the past to the present is marked by breaks that are purposely infused into the narration to disrupt any order that may enhance coherence. Though the two major characters, Tanga and Anna-Claude are of different races, Beyala's choice of the same gender and similar frustrating experiences provide the foundation for the merging of subjectivities that is to take place in the narration.

The prison is a metaphor for the fate of both characters. It is a place where they are both confined without being duly condemned by a court. Lawless men who should be in prison if justice was to be done run the system. Like Saadawi and Westerhof opine, the victims are being punished while the perpetrators go unpunished because there is no evidence against them. Tanga's introductory speech is a critique of a patriarchal setting that condemns the woman. It seems the woman is forever locked in this system that does not give her access to fair hearing. In Tanga's words, "What can I, woman, do about that? My death exists before I do, and well beyond me" (1). In order to fight death, patriarchy and injustice, which stand to kill the identity and memory of the woman, she has to narrate "self" and unsettle the assumptions that may be used to justify the incarceration of the woman.

Assumptions are sometimes tools for justifying societal assessment of certain groups of people in the society. The prostitute is most affected by these assumptions and whoever is found in the trade is characterised by a process of "othering" in which the assessor(s) is the ideal, moral agent empowered to condemn the prostitute "other". However, Tanga's experience as narrated in the first person pronoun questions this order and engenders a reordering of the condition of the prostitute. Through an unsympathetic portraiture of mother as the "other", Tanga achieves this reordering. She is a child prostitute who has found herself in an environment that cares less for the child's welfare, kills her innocence and thrusts her into adulthood without preparing her for it. Her mother who loves money more than her child resists every attempt the girl-child makes to change her life. Once, Tanga tells her mother that she would want to take a break, the old woman quickly calls a meeting of the extended family and reverts the position of Tanga as the guilty chid who disobeys her mother. Money is like "candy" to her mother who waits at home for Tanga to bring the proceeds of prostitution to her, whereas under

normal circumstances, Tanga should be the one waiting for her mother to bring her "candy":

> Mother old one is waiting for me, sitting on a mat, banknotes, collected and crinkled for months clutched in her fingers… Only money protects her from decay and holds death bay… She has become a child stuffed with candy… Emotions accumulate. Pleasure clambers up. And she hangs on to the money always - her lifebuoy. (23)

The continual presence of money gives life to her mother but kills the child, which means that the death of the child is what gives the mother life. In this way, motherhood opposes childhood and the ideals of motherhood are transgressed.

In postcolonial Africa, migration is treated as a one-way traffic whereby people move from Africa to the West in search of better economic opportunities. However, Beyala reverses this assumption and makes a French woman, Anna-Claude, leave the shores of Paris for her ideal man. By bringing her to Africa, the author attempts to blur the division between the races and projects both in the light of what they need or lack rather than what they possess. Irrespective of races, humanity is driven by the quest for something that is missing, a goal that is yet to be attained. Therefore, as Anna-Claude searches for Ousmane, Tanga searches for an avenue to express her love that is turned down by the man, Hassan. In this analysis, there is no division between "self" and the "other" and in this sense, as Doris Lessing explains; there is nothing unique about individuals; whatever experience "self" has can be found in the "other".

Tanga and Anna-Claude's experiences do not merge only in the search for the ideal, but also in the invasion of their consciousness by some unknown "phantoms". Throughout the novel, Ousmane is only an imagined persona in the mind of a hallucinating woman, Anna-Claude, who claims in addition to having this lover, that she has children in the unseen world. Her madness is clearly understood by Tanga when they meet in the prison because she has had a fair share of madness too. Being raped by

her father at the age of twelve is an experience that haunts her throughout her short existence. She has sleepless nights characterised by horrifying images:

> Some nights, when reluctant sleep keeps its distance, I see the phantoms emerge, dragging me into their paralysis. I fight back. I shout. They follow me, persecute me, collide with me. I call my father, I call my mother. They don't hear me. I scream louder. Monsters congregate around me. Two vultures where the eyes should be. They penetrate me, they lacerate me. I see my entrails in their hands. They laugh through the gaping holes of their missing teeth. (28).

Ironically, Tanga's description of her nightmare is a preview of what will later happen to Anna-Claude in the prison. The convergence of both bodies and their souls is facilitated by the realisation of this in the real life experience of the white lady. Prior to her imprisonment, she only carries the experience of rape in her mind, the idea that the outside world ripped her of her dream. She needs to have these experience "in the body" for both of them to become one. So then, the prison officers from the lowest rank to the highest take their turn on her. An occasion is towards the close of the narrative when the prison chief for interrogation summons Anna-Claude. Tanga has refused to talk despite the tortures and they think that the better way is to find out from her prison mate what she has been up to. Unfortunately for them, Anna-Claude is not better and the man is infuriated, rapes and beats her despite the fact that she is having her monthly period:

> Finally, worn out, the words fall silent by themselves. In his fury, there's a sudden luminous opening. There is nothing but fornication to bring the woman to reason. The thoughts having barely been articulated, he starts up the love machine. Hands. Fingers. Mouth. An association of every fibre imaginable for pleasure…. (127)

Anna-Claude finally becomes Tanga at the naming ceremony, which takes place in the prison. Just before Tanga dies, she declares to Anna-Claude, "Your Name Shall be Tanga"(112). Indeed when Tanga's mother comes to see her daughter at the end of the

novel, she finds the white woman who says, “I am your daughter… You have killed us both.” (137)

Beyala explores a wide array of otherness in this novel, blurring the traditional division of characters into simple groups of the good and bad, rich against the poor, men against women. In this narrative, women exploit women as much as men oppress women. Mother’s love turns into hate and deadly greed, and even among the poor, there exists a division that makes them enemies of one another.

Magona’s autobiographical novel is a pseudo-epistolary form in which a mother writes to another mother to explain and sympathise with the other woman whose daughter was killed by her son. The narrator and writer of the novel is a black South African woman who has all her life been a victim of successive apartheid governments in South Africa. Magona’s *Mother to Mother* is a fictional version of a true life event of the murder of a Fulbright scholar, Amy Elizabeth Biehl, in 1993 in the black community of Guguletu, South Africa. According to the “Author’s Preface”, the young woman had spent some time with the South African people, helping them to usher in democracy after the collapse of apartheid. The author explains that the novel is an attempt to account for the socio-political context that bred the youths who attacked and killed Amy Biehl and others like her. The narrative is done by Mandisa, the mother of the alleged killer. Even though she was not physically present at the scene of the murder and was not privy to the details that led to the murder, she tries to reinvent the story by putting together stories she has been told by neighbours and her son, Mxolisi, the accused. In this way, the text is a reinvention of a reinvented story. She recalls the circumstances under which she was brought up and the conception and birth of Mxolisi. Her story is a hydra-headed one with several branches and directions that all add up to the unfortunate killing of the young woman. Mandisa addresses herself to the mother of the young

woman, whose name she never mentions throughout the narration. She does not seek to exonerate her son but she hopes to give the dead lady's mother a perspective that may be unknown to her and that may explain better the unpardonable and likely reason for the killing. Most obvious is the angry tone that pervades Mandisa's story, anger towards a system that made such a heinous crime possible.

Mandisa reaches out to a woman and mother like self to whom many other people might have tried to reach through condolences, moral support, and encouragements. She recognises the fact that there cannot possibly be any other woman or mother who could engage in this "mother to mother" discourse like herself. She opens her story with an admission that will help disabuse the mind of the victim's mother, "*My son killed your daughter*" (1). The use of the personal pronouns "my" and "your" provides the framework for the type of bonding that Mandisa seeks. She seems to be saying, "this is between us, it is our matter, which we have to deal with". Therefore Mandisa does not address any other apart from the mother and she refers to the dead young woman as "your daughter". This "mother to mother" discourse excludes other subjects who might have for one reason or the other been visible in the course of the event. She also seeks to blur the racial boundaries between them: she is black while her addressee is white. She appeals primarily to the female and mother's instinct in the other mother.

As a point of convergence between Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Beyala's *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* the protagonist narrator also addresses a white woman and seeks communion with her. The first line of her story reads, "I am going to die, woman. White people die as well you know? (1) The novel, like Magona's, opens with one of the most important themes of the narrative, death. By opening with the unavoidable universal experience that brings humanity together, Beyala introduces the reader to the

search for a common ground that will unite the two characters. Indeed, it is also the death of the white lady that has occasioned the story the reader is about to encounter in *Mother to Mother*. The statement Tanga makes next is a summation of the author's preoccupation: "Death is copious and complex. You can add it up, multiply it, and display its deductions, the same way a merchant does with his books" (1). The lived experiences of these two female characters possess one centre; death, while their details are merely additions, multiplications, and subtractions, which rather than separate them, unite them in misery.

On the level of referentiality, one of the three axes of autobiography criticism which Mostern describes (1999), Magona's and Calixthe's texts qualify as autobiographical novels because they do refer to or describe the lives or indirectly connect with the personal experiences of the authors. These writers as Africans base their fictional works on real and verifiable experiences of Africans and non-Africans who are of the same gender as they. Tanga and Mandisa are realistic subjects of their narration and they connect with the authors' lived experiences since their narrations depict the collective experiences of their communities, a characteristic feature of women's and African autobiographies. Moreover, autobiography by nature generates other autobiographical writing in criticism in that any criticism of an autobiography, indeed literary criticism, is self representation in a way as long as it refers to the personal beliefs and position of the critic. Mostern says:

> Whether or not autobiography can in fact provide translatable answers to questions in other fields of literary studies is of less interest to me than the particular doubling which results from this notion throughout autobiography theory, including the present book: wherever a given theorist describes the position of a given autobiographer, as in whatever sense referential and/or subject-constructing, the theorist is also describing what s/he takes to be the referential and/or subjective status of her/his own work... In this way, the criticism of autobiography is particularly close to the autobiography of the critic (29).

Adimora-Ezeigbo is one of the new major writers in Nigerian literature whose publications include four collections of short stories, *Rhythm of Life* (1992), *Echoes of the Mind* (1994), *Rituals and Departures* (1996) and *Fractures and Fragments* (2006) nine children books and the trilogy: *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996) , *House of Symbols* (2001), and *Children of the Eagle* (2002) (Oloko: 2008). She belongs to the third generation of Nigerian writers among whom are Remi Raji, Mary Ifeoma Nwoye, Zaynab Alkali, Onookome Okome among others and has engaged in interrogating male-centred narratives and their depiction of traditional and modern societies, providing counter-narratives in Nigerian literature. Her short stories have been described as the exploration of "women's experiences from the insider's position" (Okafor 82),which boldly in the tradition of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and a host of others, dismantle female stereotypes and negative myths.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (2002, 2005) is the third part of the Umuga trilogy that centres on the story of the author's community. The other two are *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996) and *House of Symbols* (2001). The author states that "the saga explores the lives of men and women of four generations of two families and some other important and unimportant characters who lived in the same period and whose lives impacted one another" (v). She informs the reader that although this text is a kind of continuation of the story started in the first two novels of the trilogy, the text, like the other two, is "independent". It can be read as a part or a whole. Whether read as a whole, complete, and independent text or not, the fact remains that the author intends for the reader to make connections between the text and historical events. *Children of the Eagle* is a story, set in nineteen ninety Nigeria, about the life stories of the five daughters of the Eaglewoman. Their stories are encapsulated in the narration of the events that take place in Umuga within a period of less than three weeks around

Christmas time. The family, first four daughters namely Ogonna, Nnene, Obioma, and Amara and later Chiaku, gathers to resolve a land feud between the Umeaku family and theirs. They are also to witness the posthumous conferment of chieftancy titles on their great-grand parents, Obiatu and Ejimnaka, who along with others are being honoured for the role they played in pre-colonial and colonial Umuga community. The third reason for their gathering is to welcome their prospective English brother-in-law as he comes to ask for the hand of Amara in marriage. The birthday anniversary celebration of their mother and a memorial service for their late father, Josiah Okwara are the other two occasions that have brought them together. A remote but important reason which is also a fallout of the gathering of the Okwara family is the writing of the family book.

This project – the writing of the family book - is the most important thing to their mother because all her children will be around her at once, one thing that does not happen often due to the scattered locales of her children. It is the process of writing this book, which begins with the collection of vital information about each member of the family that lets the reader into the life of each member of the family. Nnene, the writer-academic is responsible for producing a book that befits the family. Though the project is not completed in the text, we are given an idea of the content of the book.

Magona is a black South African writer based in the United States of America. Her writing career is marked with a two-volume autobiography, *To my Children's Children* (1990) and *Forced to Grow* (1992), two volumes of short stories, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991) and *Push-Push! and Other Stories*, and a novel, *Mother to Mother* (1999). Her work negotiates the conditions of migrancy as they are replete with visions, revisions and provisions of her South African roots. Her autobiography has been applauded for its unapologetic adoption of African orality mixed with western literary conventions to produce an "interdiscursive writing"

(Daymond 1), in the order of contemporary South African autobiography. A connection can possibly be established between Magona's writing career and those of many African-American authors whose reputation as autobiographers usually precede their (being known as fictional writers) venturing into fictional writing. Louis Gates Jr. (1991) comments:

> OF THE VARIOUS genres that comprise the African-American literary tradition, none has played a role as central as has black autobiography. For hundreds of black authors, the most important written statement that they could make seems to have been the publication of their life stories... The African-American tradition is distinctive in that an author typically publishes as a *first* book her or his autobiography, establishing her or his presence and career as a writer through this autobiographical act-rather than, as for most authors, at or near the end of a productive career, or at least after an author's other works have, as it were generated sufficient interest in the life that has generated the author's oeuvre. (emphasis author's, 3)

This lengthy quotation summarises the peculiar trajectory of most African American writers and the importance of autobiography in their development as writers and Magona's location in the United States of America since the nineteen eighties might be responsible for this influence on her writing career. She is not like Wole Soyinka whose first volume of autobiography; *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981) came decades into his writing career, or Nawal El Saadawi who published the first part of her autobiography, *Daughter of Isis* (1999) many years after she has become known as a prominent Arab-African writer. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, Magona's *Mother to Mother*, indeed including her other works, is a treatise on the life of a South African woman, her community, and nation, written in what Daymond calls "talkative, first-person mode" (1).

The representations of female subjectivity play very crucial role in *Your Name Shaal Be Tanga*, *Children of the Eagle*, and *Mother to Mother*. Female subjectivity refers to the subject position of female characters in the novels. Are they isolated

individuals who stand out and alone in their narrations? Where do these female subjects position other women? What concept of otherness do they project? Female subjectivity is a much debated and theorized topic and is often used to demarcate the identity of women from men. Nancy Chodorow's seminal work on it provides the basis for its use in this chapter and is summarized by Mens-Verhulst *et al* (1993):

> Chodorow claims that mothering is reproduced by women and passed on to the next generation of women. The first human bond of both girls and boys is usually that with their mother. Because gender is an important aspect of individuals in our culture, difference becomes especially salient for boys and men. In contrast, sameness is important in the lives of girls and women. In order to achieve a male identity, boys have to separate from their mother and identify with their father, who is usually absent for much of the time… Girls do not have to draw such strict boundaries between themselves and their mothers; they do not have to separate as radically from their mothers, nor do they have to repress this bond. Instead of rigid ego boundaries, they develop permeable ego boundaries. Fundamentally, women feel connected to the world around them; female identity is mainly a relational identity. These aspects of female identity lead girls to accept the greatest share of mothering…. (3)

Although feminist critics have advanced and re-assessed Chodorow's postulation, it is clear from her theory that women and girls or mothers and daughters remain bonded long after the male child has disengaged from the mother. The difference between boys and girls in relation with their mother is that while boys seem to close up their identity from their mother, girls open it and even lean on the mother to define self. Female subjectivity is in this wise different from male's because of the difference in connection or the lack of it to the mother's identity. Sameness gives room to bonding or relationality, as difference does to isolation. Bonding occurs in female to female relationships, whether it is mother to daughter, daughter to daughter, sister to sister and other possible combinations.

Female bonding reveals the "fluid sense of self" which women possess and express in their autobiography (Cosslet et al 2). Women's life writing abounds with stories of other women and even men who have impacted their lives positively or

negatively and especially those whose impact influences the identity or identities they construct in their writing. Interestingly, this concept about female identity is sometimes cited as a source of weakness rather than strength in women's autobiography. Heilbrun, for instance, quotes Mason's most cited submission on the topic "the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other' '' (24, 207) to support her claim about the disadvantage of female identity construction to women's life writing project before 1970. Her claim is that:

> [w]ithout such relation, women do not feel able to write openly about themselves; even with it, they do not feel entitled to credit for their own accomplishment, spiritual or not (24).

The more plausible submission than Heilbrun's is that at the time that these women were writing there were hostile structures to women's autobiography and those women only used "others" as platforms to write self. Whether or not they hide their real identities as she suggests in her book, women's inclusion of others is done not on the terms proferred by others but on those they themselves have found suitable for their purpose. Heilbrun seems to have downplayed the power of the speaking subject in both fictional and nonfictional autobiographies of women. Therefore, in analysing the selected texts, attention is paid to how the narrator-protagonists have chosen and determined their relationship to others.

As a mother's story, the experience of childbirth and nurturing comes first in Mandisa's narrative. Although the story is interspersed with narratives of the collective experience of black South Africans, the choice of words, the organisation of narrative materials or events show that the speaker-narrator is appealing primarily to the female and mother's instinct in the other mother. In the first chapter, "Mandisa's Lament", she

tells of the scorn and unsympathetic comments that people have been making about her. She explains:

> People look at me as though I did it. The generous ones as though I made him do it. As though I could make this child do anything. Starting from when he was less than six years old, even before he lost his first tooth or went to school. Starting, if truth be known, from before he was conceived; when he, with total lack of consideration seeded himself inside my womb (1).

Mandisa's statement above reveals some dimensions to her story. First, the murderer is a child just as the dead lady is the other woman's child. She recalls the teething years of this child-turned-murderer, the child's first years in school. Then she proceeds to mention his conception. The careful layout of processes of conception, teething and schooling are familiar to mothers irrespective of their race and nationality. Mandisa seeks to blur the racial boundaries between them: she is black while her addressee is white but their commonality is motherhood. This child is also shown as one that has been inconsiderate even right from the womb, a trait that has followed him till his youth.

Since Mandisa hopes to elicit a sympathetic story of a boy's faulty background, she concentrates on stories that highlight either the depravity her son suffered as a child or factors, beyond their control as black people, which have influenced the violent nature of her son. Her stories highlight the strength and depth of a mother's knowledge about her children and the unusual amount of information that could be generated in a mother's story. In tracing the roots of Mxolisi's behaviour, Mandisa takes her audience, the other mother, through the history of the black neighbourhood, Guguletu, where the lady was killed. She paints a grim picture of the uprooting of black people from their homes into slums and shanty houses hurriedly and thoughtlessly constructed by the apartheid government. She recalls the cruel action by the government one morning when their homes in Blouvlei were bulldozed and they were forced to relocate to Guguletu. To show that it was a forceful and unexpected relocation to a place they never wished for,

she asks a double-edged question:

> Guguletu? Who would choose to come to this accursed, God-forsaken place? This is what I want to know – what I can't begin to comprehend. I keep asking myself the same question, over and over again. What was she doing here, your daughter? What made her come to this, of all places? Not an army of mad elephants would drag me here, if I were her (48).

Mandisa's aim is to let the other mother know that the place of their abode is not one that could be described as a good and normal place to live. She also intends to question the rationality behind the white lady's venturing into this black neighbourhood. She seems to imply that if a black woman and a resident of this neighbourhood would testify about the unsuitability of the area for human habitation, why would an outsider, a white woman, come there? The connection between the boy's behaviour and Guguletu is later made when she comments in the same chapter that the peaceful, communal and cooperative life of Blouvlei, which she grew up to know, was displaced and ruptured by this forcible relocation. She depicts Blouvlei as an environment that enabled neighbours to watch over other people's children and one that was self-sustaining in that mothers did not have to leave their immediate environment to earn their livelihood. Through a series of contrastive images, Mandisa brings her one-woman audience into the world of Mxolisi.

Another faulty foundation in Mxolisi's life, which Mandisa speaks about, is the nature of black education in apartheid South Africa. She points out that Mxolisi, a twenty-year old boy is just in Standard 6, a class far below his age. She explains that like every other black child, the boy has had to pay dearly for the struggles of his people against white oppression. In addition, the quality of education they receive as blacks is below standard. She says it is "education in name only" (72). She also talks about the unwritten approval given by the black leadership to violence, even the killing of white people. These leaders encourage black people to "make the country ungovernable!" (73),

the result of which is an unchecked violence against white people. White people are called "dogs" by black people who have suffered some kind of injustice or other as domestic workers in the homes of white people. Black on black violence also becomes a norm in Guguletu as those who are considered "sell-outs" get their properties burnt or are killed. Mandisa's narration of the black experience foregrounds the anger she feels towards a system that has sustained violence in the face of brutal and oppressive governance.

The author makes Mandisa tell stories such as these to buttress the point that her narrative is not about one subject but collective subjects for whom Mandisa speaks. This is why Magona states in the preface that rather than write about murderers, she picks on only one and gives us the mother's story:

> In my novel, there is only one killer. Through his mother's memories we get a glimpse of human callousness of the kind that made the murder of Amy Biehl possible (v).

The author's choice of one subject highlights the importance of the autobiographical "I" in telling a believable story that is capable of accomplishing the purpose for which she writes the text, which is to uncover the complicity of apartheid in the murder. Just as she does in her short story, 'Women at Work', where each woman tells her story (Daymond 331), Magona could have also created stories by the mothers of the killers in *Mother to Mother*, but she does not. She opts for a singular subjectivity probably because it will allow for better development of the story-line as this is crucial to the argument which she builds up in the novel. Despite the singularity of the speaking voice, the story is collective; it is about the experiences of a race.

Magona's text is also a response to the absence of the story from the "other" side, the side of the killers. The shame, shock, and condemnation that attended the murder must have silenced the voice of the murderers or their mothers in this discourse.

It could have been assumed that the killers did not and in fact should not have a voice once they had been found guilty. The text then is from the margins in two ways; it is a narration by a woman in a stifling apartheid and patriarchal African culture and an assumed collaborator in a killing. In the words of bell hooks, "[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (Preface). The predicament of a mother who is now not so welcome even within her community propels this narrative. Mandisa says, "it's been a long, hard road, my son has travelled" (3).

The road is predicated on the life of the mother, the bearer of a killer, who has never had the opportunity of staying at home to guide and watch her son as he grows up. Their lives have been lived in poverty and constant lack. Mandisa speaks to her one-woman audience, narrating her experience as a black South African mother through rhetorical questions. She does not hide the fact that her son gradually grew into a callous human being as a result of the depravity he constantly suffered from as a black boy. In her lament she asks:

> *Why is it that the government now pays for his food, his clothes, the roof over his head? Where was the government the day my son stole my neighbour's hen; wrung its neck and cooked it- feathers and all, because there was no food in the house and I was away, minding the children of the white family I worked for? Asked to stay for the week-end – they had their emergency... mine was just not being able to tell my children beforehand that they would be alone for the weekend... not being able to leave them enough food for the time I was away... not being able to phone and tell them of the change of plans. Who was on the phone in Guguletu then? And why would the awarding of phones have started with a nobody such as I am?*

She bombards her audience with questions that are answers in themselves. The mother to whom she speaks is not likely to have been able to identify with an experience such as this and so, Mandisa brings out the otherness of her son and self as a background to the story she tells. The government which now takes responsibility for the boy's livelihood is in the first instance implicated in his bad behaviour by failing to provide basic amenities for the black community. Mandisa also protects herself from the possibility of

being tagged a careless mother by unravelling the events that lead the boy to steal a neighbour's hen.

Just as Adimora-Ezeigbo writes about her real community in *Children of the Eagle*, Magona writes about the black neighbourhood in which she once lived before relocationg to the United States. According to Mc Haney, Magona lived in Guguletu with her parents, was a domestic worker like Mandisa, a mother of three, and was also abandoned by the father of her children (168). The mother that we meet in Mandisa is both imagined and real. She is like the author, in Gates, Jr.'s words, "bearing witness" (*Bearing Witness*). As a witness, she goes to great lengths to tell about the things she has experienced, seen and heard. As an informed mother, she demonstrates a sound knowledge of the history of her people by bearing witness to the stories that her grandfather told her when she was young about the coming of the white people into South Africa and the beginning of the unimaginable hostility between black and white people in the land. Both stories have official versions which are taught in their schools. The official version of the white settlers' story is about how "Jan van Riebeeck and his three ships", "came to build a half-way station at the Cape of Storms and called it the Cape of Good Hope!" (174). Her grandfather dismantles this story, telling her that the renaming of the place from the Cape of Storms to the Cape of Good Hope was because these white traders, having found the land habitable and good enough for them decided to become residents of the place, which they later took from its original inhabitants. The second story is about the prophecy in 1857 that the white settlers would leave their land after the people must have offered their cattle and other livestock as a sacrifice. The prophecy was that "*[a] great whirlwind will arise and drive all abelungu to the sea ... where they will all drown" (180).* It turned out that despite their huge sacrifice there was no change except for the hunger and deaths that greeted their action. The prophetess,

Nongqawuse, in the official version is called false and the people ignorant. Again, her grandfather enlightened her, explaining to her that it was a collective action taken in desperation to see the whites leave their land so that she changes her mind and arrives at a modified conclusion that "what had seemed stupid decisions, and acts that had seemed indefensible became not only understandable but highly honourable" (183).

The position of this story in the text is strategic for several reasons. Mandisa links this story with the murder of the young woman by emphasising the refrain of her grandfather's story: "Deep run the roots of hatred here" (176). Her son is only walking in the stead of his forebears who were willing to pay such a huge price in order to rid their land of these intruders. Second, since the murder victim is white, she is considered a descendant of those their forebears failed to expel so that Mxolisi did not see an individual but an institution, a type of those who have long been established as their enemies. Mxolisi's action and the woman's death both become contextualised in the larger framework of the struggle against whites' invasion of South Africa. She goes on to say, quoting her grandfather:

> *Hayi ilishuwa!*
> *Amabhulu, azizinja!*
> One settler, one bullet!
> By the match stick, we shall free our nation!
> 'Oh the road has been long, indeed. The songs came much, much later, I can tell you that. Before the songs, many others tried to rid our nation of those ones without colour, who had come from across the great sea (182).

This story which comes towards the end of the narrative is a summary of what Mandisa hopes to achieve, just as her grandfather was able to change her mind, she also hopes to show that her son's action would be understood better by an outsider, the other mother. She concludes her story with the following statements:

> My son was only an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race. Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being. It saw through his eyes; walked with his feet and wielded the knife that tore mercilessly into her

> flesh. The resentment of three hundred years plugged his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties... My son, perhaps not a murderer. Perhaps, not yet. (210)

Moreover, Mandisa's accomplishment as a storyteller and historical repertoire is also a continuity of the nature of autobiographical practice in African oral literature. According to Alabi in his paper, "I am the hunter who kills elephants and baboons": the Autobiographical Component of Hunters' Chant", hunters' chants are autobiographical and are used to "contest representations and to teach the history of Yoruba communities" (27). Mandisa's life-story will not be complete without teaching the history of her people.

In more than one sense, *Mother to Mother* is a story of the other, that is to say from the other side. As stated earlier on, it is the story from the side of the killer who may not have any other platform to tell his own side of the story apart outside of the mother's narrative. It is also a story from the black people to the white, a story that the black woman subject may not have any better chance to tell than in an explanatory and interrogatory story of a helpless mother of the guilty. The little strands of stories Mandisa tells about pregnant teenage girls when she was growing up constitute an experience that she also had which denied them of subjecthood; one that explains the silence that such girls had come to know as premature mothers. Denied subjecthood, because they have been silenced by the condemnation from their shocked parents, stigmatised by their peers and the society, rejected by unwilling boys who got them pregnant, and in all these spaces they are objects of other people's actions and narrative. By telling the other mother the story of Mxolisi's unwanted and unexpected conception, Mandisa projects a self that is aware of and that has experienced grief of many kinds including being cut off from the community in which she expects to find solace.

Mother to Mother positions the mother as an authorised storyteller, an authentic source of life stories and a resourceful advocate who narrates life in response to the need

to explain death. The image of the mother as a medium, carrier, and reinventor of personal, familial, and national histories is visible throughout the narration. Mandisa, the mother-narrator, is an active enunciator of otherness.

Unlike the narrator-protagonists of Magona and Beyala's texts, Adimora-Ezeigbo presents narrators rather than a single narrator, and the women who are connecting are not strangers but sisters of the same mother. The representation of female subjects in *Children of the Eagle* is a more complex and evasive type than what obtains in the other texts. In the first instance, the novel starts with a third-person omniscient narrator and moves on to the first person in different chapters of the text. It is in the ninth chapter of the first part of the four-part novel that the autobiographical "I' surfaces. It seems the author deliberately subsumes the identity and voices of individual persons, this time women, in the third person as a means of underscoring the communality that is centralised in the novel. The five daughters of the Eaglewoman, the name given to the mother figure in the novel, are introduced in the first chapter of part one, where the reader is informed that only four out of five daughters are around at the beginning of the narration. They are, as listed in the novel,

> Ogonna Okwara-Nduka: a secondary school teacher in Lagoon City. Married with four children- two sons and two daughters.
>
> Nnenne Okwara-Okoli: a senior lecturer at the University of the South in Lagoon City. Married with two children- a daughter and a son.
>
> Obioma Okwara-Ebo: a church leader, pastor and evangelist who lives n Lagoon City. Married with four children- two sons and two daughters.
>
> Amara Okwara: a journalist living in Coal City. Single. She has no intention of bringing children into this world.
>
> Two other siblings have not arrived:
>
> Chiaku Okwara-Kwesi: a medical doctor who practises medicine in London and lives in a flat with her African-American friend. Divorced. She does not have a child.
>
> Nkemdirim Okwara: a secondary school boy in Kada City, the youngest member of the family (3-4).

In the above resume of each of the major characters that we meet in the novel, one can notice a trend in the author's presentation; their professions are mentioned first, followed by where they live, their marital statuses, and the presence or absence of children in their lives. The biographer-cum-third person narrator-cum-author seems to be interested in making the reader believe that apart from being female and born by same parents, they are upwardly mobile women who possess varying identities in respect of motherhood. As motherhood is employed by Magona to bond her characters to each other, Adimora-Ezeigbo, through this resume, attempts to achieve the same purpose by including their "motherly" statuses.

The image of an irrepressible mother in the person of the Eaglewoman, who has maintained a close bond with her children, is a focal point in the novel. In the last part of the resume that we see above, mention is made of the last child of the family, Nkemdirim who also is the only male child. The circumstance surrounding the birth of the boy and his appearance as a son of Eaglewoman is a secret that ties the women and their mother to the exclusion of others, including the women's husbands. The boy is actually the fruit of the youthful escapade of Obioma, the pastor-daughter of the Eaglewoman. While their father was still alive, in the confusion and economic instability of the post-war Eastern Nigeria, Obioma, a final year secondary school student was impregnated by her soldier-benefactor. On an agreement between members of the family, Obioma gave birth to the child while in hiding at the place of the family's good friends in Ibaland in the South. When the time of delivery came, Eaglewoman, who had been pretending to be pregnant, joined her, and they both came home with the baby who was now to be reckoned as the much awaited male-child of Eaglewoman who would deliver the family from the derision of the society. As insignificant as this story about the birth and membership position of Nkemdirim in the family seems, it is an anchor on

which other stories directly or indirectly hang.

The idea that "mother is gold" as well as the compulsory mother image that is imposed on African women in their societies is one that has been problematised. The conservative and one-sided portraiture of the childless woman as being doomed in African literature has divided male writing from female, tradition from the modern, the Western from the African. These polarities are consequences of the possible ways in which motherhood can be and is conceived by African writers.

It is interesting to note that *Mother to Mother*, *Children of the Eagle*, and *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* all present at least three generations of mothers in their texts. This technique can be read, in the terms of authors' treatment of female subjectivity, as texts in celebration of the value that Africans place on extended family systems. Children are tied to their parents, grandparents and great-grand parents in ways that question the viability of the existence of isolated individuals in African societies. *Children of the Eagle* stands out as a text that extensively gives a very positive and favourable portraiture of mothers as far back as the fourth generation. Nnenne, the character through whose perspective a reasonable proportion of the novel is presented, is an exceptionally gifted woman. Although like her sisters, she has inherited their mother's resourcefulness and strength, she possesses characteristics that go far beyond her mother and are traced to her greatgrand-mother, Ejimnaka.

According to family and communal history, Ejimnaka, mother to an only child, Aziagba, was one of the female members of *Obuofo*, the highest ruling body of precolonial Umuga community, who resisted the incursion of colonial power to the point of death. She was a woman of unparalleled inner and physical strength who could match any adversary, male or female, strength for strength and even overcome. Nnenne is described as the reincarnate of this woman and it is no wonder, despite the victimization

she suffers as an academic, she is still able to stand. Indeed, Nnenne is unlike some of her colleagues who, she says, are performing far below expectation:

> Many an academic has lost discipline. Some recycle the same old notes totally ignorant of developments in their field. Some have abandoned research for the pursuit of money- a disease that attacks the system throughout the country, from the south to the north, from the east to the west. (172)

Adimora-Ezeigbo tactically builds an image of otherness around this character by underlining her strength, commitment to work, exposure, and importance as the member of the Okwara family to carry on the trend which Ejimnanka's life initiated in their maternal lineage. She has been denied promotion for several years but she is stronger for it. She shares with her sisters:

> ... But I no longer allow the delay to trouble me, to dampen my enthusiasm to do the things that interest me at work or outside work. I do my work, look after my students. I know my appointment will come just as light comes to overtake darkness (170).

The experiences of Nnenne are punctuated with strong and formidable display of "heroinism" such that she is clearly singled out as possibly the most intelligent and better known character to the reader than others, even her sisters. She is bolder, and more outspoken than her sisters or any other character in the novel and it seems Adimora-Ezeigbo uses her to epitomise remarkable strength and intelligence of the female child, girl, and woman. This character's positive traits are traced back to a childhood and girlhood that evinced irrepressibility.

On an occasion during this visit to their mother, Nnene and Ogonna recall an experience the family went through when they were younger. The extended family had decided without due consultation with Eaglewoman and her children that their father's unmarried sister, who needed an accommodation, was to be moved into a shop that was located in the front of their house. It was a discomfort that their father was willing to bear without considering its effect on the well-being of his family because in

Eaglewoman's words, "... he does not want to offend his brothers and sisters" (70).The reason for not seeking the opinion and consent of the woman and her daughters was simply because of their gender. In their culture, female children are discriminated against and sidetracked whenever any vital decision is to be taken. So, as a critique of this practise, Adimora-Ezeigbo includes an experience like this to underscore the ability of women when they bond to defeat even the most formidable enemy. On the day of the operation, the five girls, Ogonna, Nnenne, Obioma, Chiaku, and Amara, dressed up and stood by the gate of their house. Ogonna recalls:

> My sisters and I wore our win-the-war shorts and sandals made from discarded vehicle tyres and positioned ourselves at the gate like soldiers standing sentinel. For a weapon, we armed ourselves with courage... Papa was astonished to see us at the gate. Before he could address us, we began to shout we did not think it was right to turn a shop into living quarters because such a move would spoil the beauty of our home... Not even a refugee would request to be quartered in such a place, we argued. Nnenne insisted that our opinion should be asked for and taken into consideration in a matter that affected us. (70)

Nnenne was the only one who could point out to their father and the other members of the group the fundamental issue to this act. In Ogonna's narration, she mentions that it was not as if they were opposed to their aunt coming to live with them, but they thought the shop was not an appropriate place, a fact that could have emerged if they or their mother had been duly consulted. Nnenne's remark during the confrontation is actually the reason why such an event would have any relevance to the portraiture that the author intends to give her female character, especially Nnenne, whose outspoken and bold traits are reminiscent of their great-grandmother.

The author also endows her with supernatural abilities which others do not possess. She is able to see people and things beyond ordinary physical eyes could see and is also able to foresee future events. Her sisters keep referring, at different points in the novel, to times when they were younger and Nnenne's "gift" was what saved the

family from one calamity or another. This ability was actually "passed on" to her by her great-grandmother's friend who is also described in the novel as one of the foremothers of Umuga community. It is this quality in Nnenne that has now been converted into exceptional writing proficiency. As a poet and novelist, she is able to transform the most ordinary event or sight into an extraordinary one through writing. Again, her poetic attribute is linked with another character in the past who was also their great-grandmother's friend and member of the *Oluada*. Adimora-Ezeigbo's penchant for narrating reincarnation is freed by depicting a character like Nnenne, who is an embodiment of the positive traits which made those foremothers outstanding in their days and worth celebrating in the contemporary time of the novel.

Ofure Aito, in her essay, "Return of the Strong Ones: Reincarnation as Development and Continuity in the Trilogy of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo", argues that against the negative use of reincarnation in the works of Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the African concept to underline female strength and relevance. In the essay, she points out that one of the qualities that supports and strenghtens Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist writing is the fact that in the trilogy, especially *Children of the Eagle*, the author celebrates a formidable present by connecting her characters to the foundation laid by foremothers. She states "The novel celebrates reincarnates of the past 'Oluada'. But this time, the amazons of Umuga and Atagu are our contemporaries who combine the spirit of the past with the temper of the present to transform the world" (172). This transformation is made possible through the cooperation of the living, one of whom is Nnenne, to maintain the image of the "strong women".

The autobiographical occasions in the novel are necessitated by the writing of the family book. Since Nnenne, the writer, is unable to determine the contents that each of her sisters will like to include in their life stories, she has to depend on them to tell their

stories themselves. This strategy works both for Nnenne and the author in the novel. The self that each of these women narrates is comprehensible only within a context that incorporates or involves the importance of others as members of the same gender and family. By making them tell their stories, Nnenne hopes to occlude the possibility of unreliability through misrepresentation, an error that could mar their existence as a group or disrupt the bond they have maintained through their lives. So that when they tell self, they also become responsible for whatever details they have included in their own life-stories. On the part of the author, she protects Nnenne from reader's censureship by making sure for instance, that such a well-kept secret of Nkemdirim's birth is not exposed by Nnenne the writer, but by Obioma, the one that is directly involved. Moreover, their individual voices are heard and not subsumed in the collective, as the author makes us see that they are all important in the totality of the narration. This is important as pointed out in previous chapters, that African autobiography is not an exclusive or isolated story of self, and at the same time it is not so communal or collective that the individual voice or self is drowned by the communal voice. Their life-stories will make meaning in the family book when read as branches of the same tree of female self-expression and actualization.

Motherhood is not to be seen merely as a defining characteristic of African womanhood in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*. It is a pointer to the freedom of choice that contemporary African women have in defining self. Irrespective of societal assessment of her female subjects and the daunting challenge they face as second-class citizens according to Umuga culture, she makes them excel as human beings, women, and committed members of their community. Although "children" connect to motherhood, we do not meet any of the women's children and we are given the impression that their lives centre around their children's as is the case with their

mother's. They spend almost a month away from their children without having any problems and for Amara, she has decided not to have children. Adimora-Ezeigbo seems to seize on this aspect to explore the changes that are coming up in contemporary Africa with regard to the issue of motherhood.

Beyala explores the possibility of an alternate narrative of motherhood in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga.* The fact that the story is that of a girl child has implications for the concept or image of motherhood that is projected in the novel. In the first instance, since she is the eye/"I" through which we see all other characters except Anna-Claude, Tanga for once exercises the power that has been consistently denied her by her parents, patriarchy, and the society. Darlington argues that all through the short existence of Tanga, she has been at the mercy of "classifiers" and has been denied subjectivity as a result of this act (3). While we agree with this assertion, we also want to argue that the autobiographical "I" to a certain extent restores her subjectivity and repositions the classifiers in this novel. It should be noted that all the abusers of Tanga, prior to her taking up the "I" of the story, were at the centre from where they pushed Tanga to the margins. She does get the reader to begin to classify her parents, especially her mother and other oppressors through the projection she gives in her life story. Although she calls her mother, "mother old one" because apparently that is the name by which she has been brought up to name the woman but the reader, as Darlington has rightly done could name her a tormentor, and also, quoting Nfah-Abbenyi, as an 'oppressive agent'. These names are opposed to the image of mother as life-giver, nurturer, friend and confidant which the reader is presented with in *Children of the Eagle.*

Apart from the fact that Tanga's mother gave birth to her, there is no other point at which both characters connect. They are always at different poles, with the mother shooting at every attempt that the girl child has to live a happy and fulfilled childhood

and girlhood. When Tanga decides to leave prostitution and informs her mother, the fury that greets the announcement is shocking. The thought of her means of livelihood being cut off produces verbal abuse and finally a curse:

> 'Get the hell out! Bitch! You want me dead... But you'll go before I do. Day and night I'm going to be praying to heaven. It will fill your vagina with stones. And the words I speak today will come true as the fact that I carried you in my belly for nine moons.' She spits on the ground three times, claps her hands so that the owls will carry her voice way beyond the treetops and the waters (38).

As a mother, she is not praying for her daughter to live but to die. She invokes motherhood, symbolised by her 'belly", not to deliver the child from any trouble but to put her in bondage and ensure that everything contrary to life, for which the mother is known to give through childbirth, is given to Tanga. She also says she will fill her "vagina with stones", meaning the only avenue for survival which the girl child has been brought up to know will be blocked and rendered useless for its owner. It is after this scene that Tanga declares that her life is a "deconsecrated room" (38), since the one to whom she could run to in times of trouble for comfort and hope has desecrated the bond that binds mother to child - life.

Death, rather than life, surrounds the image of the mother in this novel. Each time Tanga mentions her mother and other mothers, the reader should expect a narration of events that are very pungent with the image of destruction, depravity, squalor, and death. Camilla is a white prostitute to whom Tanga narrates her life story prior to her arrest and imprisonment. Camilla is notorious for the unabashed manner in which she practises prostitution. Unlike Tanga who denies being a prostitute, she admits to being one and does make her body available to numerous men who come to drink at the cafe where she works. Being a child born to alcoholic parents and having a very traumatic childhood, Camilla dreamt of living a better life than her parents and also wished to give her children the love and care she was denied as a child. She gets married but is later

abandoned by the man, Pierre, after which she launches herself into the trade of prostitution with two children to cater for. She would "load them with valium and whiskey" and eventually, Tanga says, "Later, I will learn that her two children died in an explosion of bottled gas. I respect her for that. May God forgive me" (87). Camilla commits infanticide as a way of escaping the hardship she and the kids were facing. For her, motherhood is to sacrifice the children's life for the mother to live just as Tanga's mother believes.

Just as Miller argues concerning some Senegalese women writers (*Reproduction*), Beyala also seems to have produced a counter narrative to Senghor's "mother is gold" metaphor. These women present a negative image of the mother as one capable of inflicting pain, even death on their children. Within this community of mothers of pain and death is Foot-Wreck's mother who locks up her new-born child with the intention of getting him killed. There is hardly any mother in the tradition of motherhood that is depicted in this novel. Even grandmothers' acts are despicable and unspeakable. Tanga's grandmother was a village whore who was repeatedly raped by passers-by, the fruit of which is Tanga's mother. There is no positive or loving memory of Tanga's grandmother, and the little that we know of her only goes to buttress the projection of terrible mothers. Closely related to this portrayal of shameful motherhood is the fact that most of the women who populate the text either choose not to have children or have just one or two. The image of women as joyful child bearers is clearly eroded. Tanga's grandmother cursed her own womb, so also did Foot-Wreck's mother and those who procreate do it for commercial purposes. Tanga comments that "in Iningue, the woman has forgotten the child, the gesture that brings love – she's just an egg-laying hen" (57). Tanga herself takes to her heels the moment her short-time lover, Lame-Leg hints on the issue of procreation. She is not interested in having children in a

world that has been so cruel to her.

However, it is remarkable that despite the depravity that Tanga has suffered as a child and the abuse by her mother, she is willing to be a good mother to Mala, also known as Foot-Wreck. Tanga hopes to be different from her mother and the other mothers of the novel. She looks after the boy, buys things for him, showers him with attention and interacts with her "adopted" son in a manner that underscores the possibility of being a normal mother in a society that is turned upside down. It is as she looks for money to take care of the boy that she is arrested. Another unusual environment where there seems to be mothering of some sort is in Lame-leg's illegal camp for children. Here, children take care of other children. Even though they are made to work and bring money to Lame-Leg, the boss, the children still prefer the conditions of this camp to what obtains in their homes. It is strange that on Beyala's fictive canvas, only children show the slightest tendency of being able to give what adults have failed to give their children - care and love. Lame-Leg claims:

> You know, he says suddenly, I've struggled for the existence of this place where childhood can live and speak... I wanted the child to go all the way to the death of childhood, and to be reborn divest of his parents. And nothing but love to dress him in (115).

Tanga strategically refers to herself as the girlchild-woman. This position of not being a full child or woman serves two purposes in the text. She is able to look into both the world of adults and children. Being an autobiographical writing, this method in a way authenticates her story as she is speaking as an insider in both situations. In another sense, because she is neither a full adult nor a child, the author presents us with a character that is in transit and is deprived the benefits derivable from either of these statuses. As a child, she is not catered for, rather she is the breadwinner; she has no opportunity to grow and enjoy the passage of childhood; she is taught to be submissive but not equipped with the mind of the adult that can demand submission and some

respect in the society. Her abuse is at the centre of both narratives of the child and woman. Girls grow into women; women have homes; jobs, places in the society, and they exercise some measure of control over their lives. Tanga never enjoys any of these, it is only in her dreams that she accesses such privileges and she is never able to have them in reality as her life is cut short in prison.

So far, this chapter has attempted to examine the different colourings and perspectives of motherhood and female subjectivity that are possible as evident in the works of Adimora-Ezeigbo, Magona, and, Calixthe Beyala. Their treatment of mothers questions any simplistic description or categorisation of women as mothers. The autobiographical mode enables these female authors to centre the aspirations of African women and the narrative they engage in within the framework of larger national and gender issues.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: *OLOTO* THEORY OF OTHERNESS AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This study has so far attempted to explore the different strategies employed by African women writers in autobiography to underscore their otherness, not as powerless subjects, but as those who appropriate the speaking position to promote individual uniqueness. The review of relevant critical works on autobiography reveals a neglect of the study of autobiography in African literature and a further marginalisation of African women's autobiography. The attention given to Francophone women's autobiography overshadows the possibility of establishing a tradition based on the works of women from different regions of Africa. The analyses of selected texts reveal that gender ranks as the most significant factor that links these women writers. Their texts are all written within the framework of feminist resistance to the silencing and marginality of women in the society.

Nawal El Saadawi, Wambui Otieno, and Tendayi Westerhof are all public figures, prominent for their activism against women discrimination in their respective countries and internationally. They deploy memory to recall, rewrite, review critically to revisit their personal experiences as women and as nationals of postcolonial African states. These writers blur the distinction between private and public space, breaking the barriers of silence and marginality by discussing issues that are not ordinarily expected to be brought to the public space. These include their sexual life, sexuality, shortcomings in the characters of family members, family intrigues among others.

The study reveals that fictional autobiographies authored by African women continue in the interrogation of patriarchy and the redefinition of women's role in the system. Motherhood and the demonstration of the power of female bonding dominate

Beyala's *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, and Magona's *Mother to Mother*. While the mother in *Children of the Eagle* represents the mother as friend or helper, the mother in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is a destroyer, parasite and everything that a mother should not be. Mother in Magona's text does not share in the liberty that the other mothers have in their fictive world. Unlike in Beyala's and Akachi-Ezeigbo's where the protagonist-narrators are the children, it is the agonising mother who tells the stories of her life and her son's.

In both fictional and non-fictional texts that are selected for this study, authors concentrate on the difference or otherness of their narrator-protagonist. This strategy connects their works to the theory of *Oloto*:

Oloto ni t'ohun oto,	*Oloto* says hers is different,
Oto ni ti Tolu,	Different is that of *Tolu*
Oto ni ti To'luwo	Different is that of *Toluwo*
Oto ni ti Tolutolu	Different is that of *Tolutolu*

As discussed in Chapter Three, *Oloto* discourse is usually evoked in Yoruba culture when there is a need to highlight otherness or difference. *Oloto* is a counter-discourse to existing theories of otherness because otherness from the *Oloto* perspective is a celebration of the uniqueness of individual women, not a degradation of their womanhood. It also presents the African sense of individuality and not the Western concept of individualism. *Oloto* is different but not isolated because others play a vital role in the difference that she underlines. *Oloto* upturns the negative colouring that accompanies otherness in postcolonial criticism by asserting her rights to otherness and also extending her domain by assigning varying positions to other people. Autobiography as well as the *Oloto* discourse is also occasioned by an innate desire to show that an individual or group of people stands out from others. It does not matter how collective or communal the autobiography might be, differences in language,

religion, culture, and geographic location are some of the features that are explored as points for attesting to the difference of that collective or community from others. As revealed in this study, African women writers have engaged in autobiographical writing for the purpose of underscoring their difference from men and sometimes women. Their gender, socio-cultural and political experiences separate these autobiographers from others.

Moreover, the overarching attribute of *Oloto* is that she is a possessor of her discourse of otherness and this in a sense, empowers her. This is manifested in two ways; *Oloto* names self and her difference. Being the first in a line of otherness, Oloto, to a large extent influences the terms that bring "*Tolu*", "*Toluwo*", and *Tolutolu* into a relational framework with her. Apart from this, the clause "*Oloto* says hers is different", presages some elements of difference which she might later state. The autobiographer as we see in Saadawi for instance, provides the stories that make her different first from men and certain women.

Furthermore, the organising structure of the discourse depicts *Oloto* as the "owner" or "ruler" of her domain just as illustrated in Chapter Three. *Olowa* as a traditional ruler of Owa is named as *Olowa* because the place or domain that he is named after is under his rulership. His name as *Olowa* positions him as the "owner", even if only in principle, of this domain. Likewise, *Oloto* expresses or vocalises her difference as a way of registering some measure of ownership over for instance, the attributes of the difference she speaks about. So that, apart from naming the discourse and naming the course or ranking of otherness, she engages in naming those attributes that make her different. It reads: "*Oloto ni t'ohun oto*", (*Oloto* says hers is different). The use of the possessive pronoun, hers, indicates possession of the knowledge in of those "things" of otherness. Since it is the case that possessive pronouns "show

ownership", *Oloto* demonstrates ownership over the set or sets of markers of otherness. The autobiographer tells her life story as "my story" because the life no matter how oppressed, abused, suppressed, or dehumanised it might have been, still belongs to the "owner" who is the subject of her/his narrative.

Post-de Beauvoir feminism argues for a flexible use of otherness because it is realised that to continue to position women rigidly as an other is in itself disempowering and disadvantageous to women. Shifts are favoured as long as the interests of women are protected and valued. Women in women, that is gender, women in colour, that is race, women with/without substance, that is class, women as colonists or colonised, that is postcolonialism, are the multiple sites for women's otherness. The fact that a woman can be the other of men, women in respect of race, class, and colonial status supports the view of Post-de Beauvoir feminists. So that consciously or unconsciously, when they engage in autobiography, the materials or concerns that they use or voice are not carelessly but carefully applied as products of the various interstices of otherness.

All the texts studied demonstrate otherness in the resistance that the narrators-protagonists show to patriarchy and the silencing of women. Saadawi does this by choosing themes around issues of female oppression and suppression. She tells of the attempt by her father to erase her mother's presence from the child's writing. By narrating stories about her aunts' unfortunate and unfair treatment by men and the unjust handling of pregnant teenage girls in *A Daughter of Isis*, she interrogates the concept of regarding women as objects to be used and dumped at will. She fights back at the culture that encourages the male child to attain higher heights academically and discourages female children from pursuing the same goals in life. *A Daughter of Isis* identifies with the resistance framework of feminist literature which speaks against gender inequalities.

Otieno's *Mau Mau's Daughter* situates itself within the Oloto framework by

narrating the contributions of women in the struggle against colonialism, an aspect that is not given prominence in Kenyan men's autobiographies. She includes the functions she performs and her activities as a woman during the struggle for freedom. Her interest in the roles of other women underscores the significance of gender cooperation and unity during this period of their national history. Through her autobiography, she questions the marginalisation of women in successive Kenyan governments despite the fact that the freedom that the nation enjoys is a product of both male and female relentless contributions. Westerhof's autobiography is a pioneer work by an African woman in HIV narrative. Her text also fits into the feminist resistance framework by speaking against the erroneous notion that women are responsible for the spread of HIV. She narrates her experiences as a single woman and mother whose life is marred by the negative assessment the society does of women in her category. The stories of the fathers of her children who used and abandoned her are employed in the story to protect the interest of the single mother and rewrite their stories in social history.

The women in *Children of the Eagle* succeed in spheres where men have failed; they fight for their rights and their mothers's and also show that the absence of a man in a home does not render the women incapacitated. The only surviving male of the Eaglewoman's family is only mentioned in the stories of the women and yet the family's progress socially and materially is not stunted. *Mother to Mother* features the virility of a black mother in oppressive apartheid South Africa. Tanga's life in *Your Name Shall Be Tanga* is devoid of any positive male contributions rather she becomes her family's breadwinner after the demise of her father.

The texts converge in their exploration of marriage as a theme that connects African women and underscores the otherness of the narrators-protagonists from different perspectives. Saadawi looks into the marital experience of her paternal and

maternal grandparents to reveal the discrimination experienced by women. The sadness, sickness and silence that marked her stories about her maternal grandmother and the erasure of women from decision making aspects of family life are some of the ways in which El Saadawi further interrogates patriarchy. Otieno on her part recollects the joy she had in her marriage until her widowhood and the hostility visited on her by the relations of her husband. Although she is not as pessimistic as El Saadawi about the role of women in marriage in traditional African settings, she however, speaks against the silencing of women through her narration of the killing of her goat by her father without her consent. Westerhof's experience as a wife who is not given her due respect and honour by her husband is also a critique of women's experience as the exploited partner in marriage.

Tanga in *Your Name* struggles to establish a home for herself but the circumstances around her incapacitated her. However, as the owner of her narrative discourse, she critiques her mother's marriage and role in order to build her own concept of marriage. Akachi-Ezeigbo uses Ogonna to critique the notion that once a woman experiences some setback in marriage, her life is irreparably damaged. Despite the uncooperative attitude of Ogonna's husband, she determines to look for other ways of finding fulfilment without breaking her marital vows. Her sister, Chiaku, decides not to remarry after the shabby treatment she received from her ex-husband.

Colonialism or imperialism as an experience that has marked the history of African states is also featured in these texts. Westerhof recollects how her marriage to a white man is viewed by the man and even the society as an unequal union. Racial discrimination works against her marriage because the man feels that he is superior to her. Since the imposition of colonial government, white people are generally seen as possessing some powers that are not accessible to black people. By narrating the

comments of her white husband and his friends, Westerhof underlines the structures of colonialism which are visible in the socio-political life of Africa. Saadawi and Otieno reinscribe the collective experience of Africa in the period of colonial occupation of Africa. They both chronicle the oppressive government of colonisers and the success of collective armed fight against this system. As Alabi surmises about black autobiography, these women, by narrating colonialism in this way, subscribe to "armed struggle" (144) as a way of resisting colonialism.

Activism unites the non-fictional autobiographies studied because in one way or another, Saadawi, Otieno, and Westerhof are engaged in organised action to achieve some social and political change. Westerhof's autobiography is premised on the need to educate women about the risks involved in changing sex partners and also uses the text as a manual for those who have been infected on what to do and how to seek for help. As mentioned earlier, Otieno's work is suffused with her involvement with the freedom fighting group, Mau Mau of Kenya. She recalls names of people, events that happened, especially those that involved her directly and narrates experiences of initiation and war time to authenticate the prominent role which she played as a freedom fighter who later becomes a political activist. Saadawi is no different as she pointedly tells the story of her development as an activist, beginning from the role her paternal grandmother played in the fight against the British occupation of Egypt to her father's activism against corrupt native government and her exile. In order to show the roots of her passion for activism, Saadawi explores stories that were told her by her father and also recollects her role as an undergraduate in the fight against colonialism in Egypt. This aspect of their writing further situates their work within the framework of resistance literature of feminist writers. The fact that they are women who confront governments and institutionalised forms of marginalisation and discrimination supports their feminist temperament.

The concept of womanhood embraced by these women, which they show through their texts, is that being female in a patriarchal setting need not cripple the aspirations of African women. They all resist the image of the subjugated and powerless women by using the autobiographical act to reposition women from the margins to the centre, to use the words of hooks, of colonialism or imperialism and patriarchy. The narrator-protagonists of the non-fictional texts demonstrate that feminism does not necessarily mean enmity with man but that African women have "lives" that can be celebrated. Despite the failure of the mother to live up to expectations, Tanga, like the other women in *Children of the Eagle* and *Mother to Mother*, shows the resilience of African women in the face of unfavourable socio-political conditions. The women of these fictional autobiographies narrate their past in order to reveal the various points where patriarchy has failed and where women have been able to create for themselves spaces in locations where they had hitherto been barred. Official accounts of the conduct and life story of Mandisa's son in *Mother to Mother* would have prevailed over the mother's if not that she takes it upon herself to bear witness to the things her son suffered growing up in apartheid South Africa. The prospect of having a white woman tell the story of a black girl in the future brightens up the darkness that permeates Tanga's narrative. Nnenne takes up the task of life writing as a way of historicising the strength, courage and resourcefulness of her mother and other four sisters.

The fictional autobiographies studied underline the potency of the speaking subject just as is shown in non-fictional autobiographies. The authors succeed in creating a community of female who rise above limitations and negative circumstances to build images of cooperative relationships among women irrespective of racial difference. The narrator-mother in *Mother to Mother* appeals to certain instinct in the audience-mother who does not belong to the same race or live in the same country with

her.

Through their autobiographies, Saadawi, Otieno, and Westerhof resist the image of the African woman as a voiceless member of the family. They project their difference from this image by narrating the stories of other women who are not as vocal, courageous, and active as they are. Westerhof recreates the image of women living with HIV/AIDS by narrating sympathetic stories of her experience by showing her strength in the times of adversity and the failure of her husband to cope with the same challenge. Saadawi recalls her brilliant performance in school as against the weakness of her brother and also highlights the failure of other women around her to demonstrate the type of inner strength she possesses in fighting against certain practices and beliefs. Otieno's text is laced with stories of her invincibility even in the face of stiff opposition. Like the other two, she is a lone fighter who speaks and acts against ethnicity and unjust treatment of widows and women generally. They portray the image of the woman-made-self as against the man-made-self as the one who possesses certain qualities that are downplayed in the patriarchal and Western depiction of the African woman.

Another point of convergence in these autobiographies is the deliberate attempt by these women to blur the boundaries between the private and the public. By narrating family secrets and female sexualities, Saadawi, Otieno, and Westerhof, including the narrators of the fictional texts studied, transgress the limits of speakability that are imposed on women. They document events in their respective families that are otherwise expected to remain secrets. Westerhof recalls the sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of her white husband and Saadawi and Otieno tell stories that are not so positive about their relatives.

The use of epithet-like titles also unites these works. They drop their proper names on the cover of their texts to take up names that are self-designated as they

underscore their speakability as autobiographers and the self-naming tradition of African womanism. Tanga bonds with Anna-Claude and renames the former, Mandisa calls her one-woman audience “mother’ in order to connect with her.

The study shows that in the context of *Oloto* theory, throughout their narrations, Saadawi, Otieno, and Westerhof often isolate self from the collective as a means of critiquing some of the cultural and religious practices of their families and societies. Unlike in African men’s autobiography tradition where the male is quick to identify with the collective “we”, these women are selective in the use of such collective subjectivity and consciously stand out as individuals who are not so favoured in patriarchal structures. Saadawi names her uncles as bloodsuckers and unearths the flaws in her aunts and separates self from them. Otieno goes a step further to officially cut off age-long kinship ties in order to reveal her disconnection from the acts of her late husband’s relative and decision to bury her husband in accordance with Luo customs. Westerhof writes about the society that discriminates against her and people of the same HIV status as her.

The nonfictional texts studied differ in language, attitude to religion, age, and national historical contexts. Saadawi’s text was originally written in Arabic, a factor that affects the translation of certain words and concepts which are explained in the footnotes. Otieno’s and Westerhof’s autobiography are written in English but are replete with indigenous words and concepts which may not be easily available to readers outside the writers’ cultures. The presence of Arabic, Gikuyu, and Shona words and concepts are indications of the multicultural settings of Africa. Linguistic differences also accentuate the relationship of these writers to English, the language of the coloniser. Closely related to the linguistic difference are the aesthetic and creative qualities of these texts. Saadawi’s career as an established fictional and non-fictional writer reflects in the

manner in which she delivers her stories that are embellished and pleasant to read. Otieno on the other hand writes a document-like autobiography which concentrates on giving details of names and locations of events which she narrates. Westerhof text is simple and direct and is the smallest volume of the three.

These women show through their autobiographical writing that otherness is a complex term and position and that rather than a cause for silence and disadvatanged location, through the autobiographical “I”, otherness can be empowering. Contemporary African women’s autobiography is a tradition that is distinguishable from others because of the different and critical ways in which African women engage their national, familial, and personal histories and reposition women as possessors of discourse and the determinants of the parameters of otherness in the order of *Oloto*.

WORKS CITED

Primary Texts

Beyala, Calixthe. *Your Name Shall be Tanga*. Trans. Marjolijn de Jager. London: Heinemann, 1996. Print.

El Saadawi, Nawal. *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi.* Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1999. Print

Ezeigbo, Akachi. *Children of the Eagle.* Lagos: Lantern Books, 2005. Print.

Magona, Sindiwe. *Mother to Mother*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. Print.

Otieno Wambui. *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998. Print.

Westerhof, Tendayi. *Unlucky in Love*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2007. Print

Secondary Texts

Adams, Timothy Dow. *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography.* Chapel Hill: U of Carolina P, 1990. *Questia.* Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Afejuku, Tony E. "Cultural Assertion in African Autobiography" *Meta,* XXXV (1990): 689-701. *JSTOR.* Web. 11 Jan. 2008.

Aito, Ofure. "Return of the Strong Ones: Reincarnation as Development and Continuity in the Trilogy of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo." *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues and Perspectives*. Ed. Patrick Oloko. Lagos: African Cultural Institute, 2008. 165-174. Print.

Alabi, Adetayo. *Telling Our Stories: Continuities and Divergences in Black Autobiographies.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

---."I am the hunter who kills elephants and baboons": the Autobiographical Component of Hunters' Chant." *Research in African Literature* 38. 3 (2007) 13-25. Print.

Amireh, Amal. "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World." *Signs* 26. 1 (2000) 215-49. *JSTOR.*Web. 11 Jan.2008.

Andrews, Williams and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Civitas Anthology of African American Slave Narratives.* Washington DC: Civitas Counterpoint, 1999.*Questia.* Web. 8 August 2008.

Ashley, Kathleen, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters, eds. *Autobiography & Postmodernism.* Amherst : U of Massachusetts P, 1994. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Azodo, Ada Uzoamaka. “Efuru and Idu: Rejecting Women’s Subjugation.” *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Ed. Marie Umeh. Trenton NJ: African World P, 1998. 161-187. Print.

Barber, Karin. *Africa’s hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006. Print.

---. *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution P, 1991. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill, 1977. Print.

Basu, Amrita and C. Elizabeth Mc Grory. *The Challenges of Local Feminisms: Women’s Movement in Global Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview P, 1995. Print.

Benstock, Shari, ed. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings.* Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Berryman, Charles. "Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography." *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 32.1 (1999): 71. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors.* 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.

Breckenridge, Keith. “Reasons for Writing: Working-Class Letter-Writing in Early Twentieth Century South Africa.” *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*. Ed. Karin Barber. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006. Print.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey, Upper Saddle River: Pearson Educational Inc., 2003. Print.

Bugul, Ken (Marletou M’Baye). *The Abandoned Baobab*. Trans. Marjolijn de Jager, Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill, 1991. Print.

Chapman, Michael. *Southern African Literatures.* London: Longman, 1996. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Chinosole. *The African Diaspora & Autobiographics: Skeins of Self and Skin.* New York: Peter Lang, 2001. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Cosslett, Tess, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods.* London: Routledge, 2000. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Coullie, Judith Lutge. "(Dis)locating Selves: Izibongo and Narrative Autobiography in South Africa." *Oral Literature and Performance in Southern Africa*. Ed. Duncan Brown, Oxford: James Curry, 1999. 61-85. Print.

Cudjoe, Selwyn. "Maya Angelou: The Autobiographical Statement Updated." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Meridian, The Penguin Group, 1990. 272-306. Print.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Reissued 2000. Print.

Darlington, Sonja. "Calixthe Beyala's Manifesto and Fictional Theory." *Research in African Literature* 34. 2 (2003): 41-52. *EBSCO*. Web. 9 Sept. 2009.

Davis, Charles and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Slave's Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. *Questia.* Web. 8 August, 2008. Print.

Davies, Carole Boyce. "Motherhood n the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu." *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature.* Eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World P, 1986, 1990. 241-256. Print.

---. "Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism." Introduction. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature.* Eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986, 1990.1-23. Print.

---, ed. *Moving Beyond Boundaries: Black Women's Diasporas.* Vol.2. London: Pluto P, 1995. Print.

Daymond, Margaret. "Complementary Oral and Written Narrative Conventions: Sindiwe Magona's Autobiography and Short Story Sequence, 'Women at Work'". *South African Studies* 28. 2 (2002): 331-46. Print.

Deck, Alice A. "Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties." *African American Review* 36.3 (2002): 505+. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Demoor, Katrien. "Diseased Pariahs and Difficult Patients: Humour and Sick Subversions in Queer HIV/AIDS Narrative." *Cultural Studies* 19.6 (2005): 737-54. *Project Muse.* Web. 20 July 2008.

Diallo, Nafissatou. *A Dakar Childhood.* Trans. Dorothy Blair. London: Longman Drumbeat, 1982. Print.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself.* Eds William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997. Print.

Eakin, Paul John. *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Early, Samantha Manchester. "Writing from the Centre or the Margins? Olaudah Equiano's Writing life Reassessed." *African Studies Review*, 46. 3 (2003): 1-16. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 May 2008.

Egan, Susanna, and Gabriele Helms. "Autobiography and Changing Identities: Introduction." *Biography* 24.1 (2001): n. pag. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Elnaggar, Marwa. "Autobiographical Fantasia." *Journal of Comparative Poetics* 22, (2002): 169-197. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2007.

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African.* First published in Great Britain by T. Wilkins 1789. Print.

Etter-Lewis, Gwendolyn. "Spellbound Audience, Identity and Self in Black Women's Narrative Discourse." Eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods.* London: Routledge, 2000. 107-27.*Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Etoke, Nathaniel. "Mariama Barry, Ken Bugul, Calixthe Beyala, and the Politics of Female Homoeroticism in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Literature." *Research in African Literatures* 40. 2 (2009): 173-189. Print.

Evans, Mary. "Extending Autobiography: A Discussion of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. Eds. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods.* London: Routledge, 2000. 76-88. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Finke, Laurie A. *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice". Ed. Shari Benstock. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 34-62. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. "My Statue, Myself: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Meridian-The Penguin Group, 1990. 176-203. Print.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton: Princeton UP 1957. Print.

Garritano, J. Carmela. "At an Intersection of Humanism and Postmodernism: A Feminist Reading of Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman.*" *Research in African Literatures,* 28.2 (1997): 57-65. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis, ed. *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. New York, NY: Meridian, The Penguin Group, 1990. Print.

---. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism.* New

York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.

---, ed. *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1991. Print.

Geesey, Patricia. Introduction. "Why African Literature." *Research in African Literatures.* 28. 2 (1997): 1-4. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Goldberger, Nancy Rule, Jill Mattuck Tarule, Blythe Mcvicker Clinchy, and Mary Field Belenky, eds. *Knowledge, Difference, and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, 1996. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Gikandi, Simon, ed. *Encyclopedia of African Literature.* New York: Routledge, 2002. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Griffiths, Morwenna. *Feminisms and the Web of the Self: The Web of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Gunn, Janet Varner. "A Politics of Experience: Leila Khaled's *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary.*" Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *De/Colonizing the Subject. The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography.* Minneapolis, Minn: U of Minnesota P, 1992. 65-80. Print.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *Desertion.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005. Print.

Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Print.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988. Print.

Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn. "Speaking in Tongues; Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. New York, NY: Meridian, The Penguin Group, 1990. 116-142. Print.

Herrmann, Anne C., and Abigail J. Stewart, eds. *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences.* Boulder, CO: Westview P, 2001. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* Tenth Edition, New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Hitchcott, Nicki. "African Herstory: The Feminist Reader and the African Autobiographical Voice." *Research in African Literature* 28:2 (1997): 16-33. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007

---. *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006. Print.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*. Boston, Ma: South End Press, 1984. Print.

Irele, F. Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the Black Diaspora.* New York: Oxford UP, 2001. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

James, Adeola. *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk.* London: James Currey, 1989. Print.

Kennedy, X.J. and Dana Gioa. *An Introduction to Fiction*, New York: HarperCollins College Publishers Inc., 1995. Print.

Kolawole, Mary E. Modupe. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Inc., 1997. Print.

---. "Space for the Subaltern: Flora Nwapa's representation and Re-Presentation of Heroinism." Ed. Marie Umeh. *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Trenton N.J.: Africa World P, 1998. 223-240. Print.

Kuzwayo, Ellen. *Call Me Woman*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1985. Print.

Lalami, Laila. "Love and Betrayal in Colonial Africa." Rev. of *Desertion* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. *The Nation* 26 Sept. 2005: 1-4. Thenation.com. Web. 24 June 2010.

Mason, Mary. "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers." James Olney. Ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. Print.

McHaney, Pearl Amelia. "History and Intertextuality: A Transnational Reading of Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*." *Southern Literary Journal* XL. 2 (2008): 166-181. *Project Muse.* Web. 5 Jan.2010.

McNee, Lisa. "Autobiographical Subjects." *Research in African Literatures.* 28.2 (1997) : 83-101. *JSTOR.* Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

---. *Selfish Gifts: Senegalese Women's Autobiographical Discourses*. Albany: State University of New York, 2000. Print.

Mens-Verhulst, Janneke Van, Karlein Schreurs, and Liesbeth Woertman, eds. *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed.* New York: Routledge 1993.*Questia.* Web. 7 August 2007.

Miescher, Stephan F. "'My Own Life': A.K. Boakye Yiadom's Autobiography - The Writing and Subjectivity of a Ghanaian Teacher-Catechist." Ed. Karin Barber. *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Print.

Miller,Mary-Kay. “My Mothers/My Selves: (Re)Reading a Tradition of West African Women’s Autobiography” in *Research in African Literatures*. 28.2 (1997): 5-15. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Aug.2007.

---. *(Re)productions: Autobiography, Colonialism, and Infanticide*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. Print.

Miller, Nancy K. "Representing.Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography.” *Differences* 6.1 (1994): 1-27. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Misch, Goerg. *The History of Autobiography in Antiquity.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951.Print.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics,* London, New York: Verso, 3rd Reprint, 2000. Print.

---, Gareth Stanton, and Willy Maley. Eds. *Postcolonial Criticism.* London: Longman, 1997. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Morgan, Thomas L. “The City as Refuge: Constructing Urban Blackness in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s *The Sport of the Gods* and James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man.*” *African American Review* 38.2 (2004):213-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 May 2008.

Mostern, Kenneth. *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth Century America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.

Natsa, Susheila. *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk.* New York: Routledge, 2004. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Newson- Horst, S. Adele. “Conversations With Nawal El Saadawi” *World Literature Today* 82:1 (2008): n. pag. *ProQuest.* Web. 18 Sept.2008.

Nfah-Abenyi, Juliana Makuchi. *Gender in African Women’s Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997. *Questia*. Web. 11 Feb. 2007.

Okafor, Chinyere Grace. “Rewriting Popular Myths of Female Subordination: Selected Stories by Theodora Adimora-Ezeigbo and May Ifeoma Nwoye.” Ed. Stephanie Newell. *Writing African Women Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997. 95-104. Print.

Okereke, Grace. “African Gender Myths of Vocality and Gender Dialogue in African Literature.” *Gender Perceptions and Development in_Africa.* Ed. Modupe Kolawole. Lagos, Nigeria: Arrabon Academic Publishers Nigeria, 1998. 133-158. Print.

Okunoye, Oyeniyi. “The Critical Reception of African Poetry.” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines,* XLIV. 4 (2004):769-91. Print.

Oloko, Patrick, ed. *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues and Perspectives*. Lagos: African Cultural Institute, 2008. Print.

Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972. Print.

---, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. Print.

---, ed. *Studies in Autobiography*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

---. *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.

Opara, Carol Chioma. *Her Mother's Daughter: The African Writer as Woman*. Port Harcourt: U of Port Harcourt P, 2004. 131-142. Print.

Oriaku, Remy. *Autobiography as Literature*. Ibadan Monograph Series, 1998. Print.

Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960. Print.

Peel, Ellen. "Self Is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography." *Twentieth Century Literature.* 35.1 (1989):1-16. *JSTOR.* Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Peterson, Derek. "Casting Characters: Autobiography and Political Imagination in Central Kenya" *Research in African Literatures* 37:3 (2006): 176-192. *Project Muse.* Web. 20 Sept.2008.

Pilcher, Jane and Imelda Whelehan. *Fifty Concepts in Gender Studies*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005. Print.

Porter, Dennis. "Edward Said." Ed. David Lodge. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 10th Edition, 1997. 294-309. Print.

Prince, Mary. "History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave (Related by Herself)." Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Six Women's Slave Narratives*. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

Renza, Louis. "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography". *New Literary History*. 9:1 (1977): 1-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Aug. 2007.

Roth, N.L and M.S. Nelson. "HIV Diagnosis Rituals and Identity Narratives" *AIDS CARE*. 2 (1997): 161-179. *JSTOR.* Web. 22 Aug. 2007.

Rice, Alison. *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing from the Maghreb*. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006.

Print.

Rickman, H.P., ed. *Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History: W. Dilthey's Thoughts on History and Society*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1976. Print.

Rushdy, Ashraf H.A. *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form.* New York: Oxford UP, 1999. *Questia*. Web. 10 Aug. 2007.

Saba Mahmood. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 16. 2 (2001): 202-36. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979. Print.

---. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1994. Print.

Sayre, Robert F. *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964. Print.

Sengupta, Shivaji. "Desire, the Private, and the Public in Flora Nwapa's Efuru and One is Enough." Ed. Marie Umeh. *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Trenton N.J.: Africa World P, 1998. 549-65. Print.

Smith, Sophie. "Interview with Nawal El Saadawi." *Feminist Revew*. 85 (2007): 59-69. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 July 2009.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, eds. *De/Colonizing the Subject. The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1992. Print.

--- . *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader.* Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1998. Print.

--- . *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001. Print.

Simola, Raisa. *World Views in Chinua Achebe's Works*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang. 1995. Print.

Sobania, Neal. *Culture and Customs of Kenya*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood P, 2003. Questia. Web. 29 May 2009.

Soyinka, Wole. *Ake: The Years of Childhood.* Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1988. Print.

Spengemann, William. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana and Chicago, U of Illinois P, 1988, 271-313. Print.

Steedman, Carolyn. “Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self.” Eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods.* London: Routledge, 2000. 25-39. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklass.* New York: Random House, 1961. Print.

---. *Everybody’s Autobiography*. New York: Random House, 1937. Print.

Thale, Thomas. “Paradigms Lost? Paradigms Regained: Working-Class Autobiography in South Africa.” *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 21. 4 (1995): 613-22. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Nov. 2007.

Tidd, Ursula. *Simone de Beauvoir.* New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Tsaaior, James Tar, “Fact of Fiction, Fiction of fact: The Novel Tradition and its Character(s).” *Ayatutu Monograph Series*, Lagos: Heirloom Publishers Company Limited, 2005. Print.

Toi, Toril. “Helene Cixous.” Ed. David Lodge. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader.* New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997. 286-293. 10th Edition. Print.

Washington, Mary Helen. “The Darkened Eye Restored: Notes Towards a Literary History of Black Women.” *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology.* Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Middlesex, Harmondsworth: Penguin Group, 1990. 30-43. Print.

Wachter, Phyllis E., and William Todd Schultz. "Annual Bibliography of Works about Life Writing, 2001-2002." *Biography* 25.4 (2002): 593+. *Questia*. Web. 14 Aug. 2007.

Watson, Julia. “Unruly Bodies: Autobiography and Authorization in Nafissatou Diallo’s *De Tilene au Plateau* (*A Dakar Childhood*).” *Research in African Literatures,* 28. 2 (1997): 34-56. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Aug. 2007.

Watson, Wendy and Nancy J. Bell. “Narratives of Development, Experiences of Risk: Adult Women’s Perspectives on Relationships and Safer Sex” *British Journal of Health Psychology*. Vol. 10 (2005): 311-327. *ProQuest.* Web. 21 July 2009.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*. 3rd Edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1962. Print.

Wilentz, G. *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. "A Sketch of the Past."*Moments of Being*. Ed. Jean Schulkind. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976. Print.

"Feminism." www.feministissues.com/radical_feminism. 28 March 2009.

http://www.redletterpress.org/feminism101.28 March 2009.